BASSET

A VILLAGE CHRONICLE

S. G. TALLENTYRE

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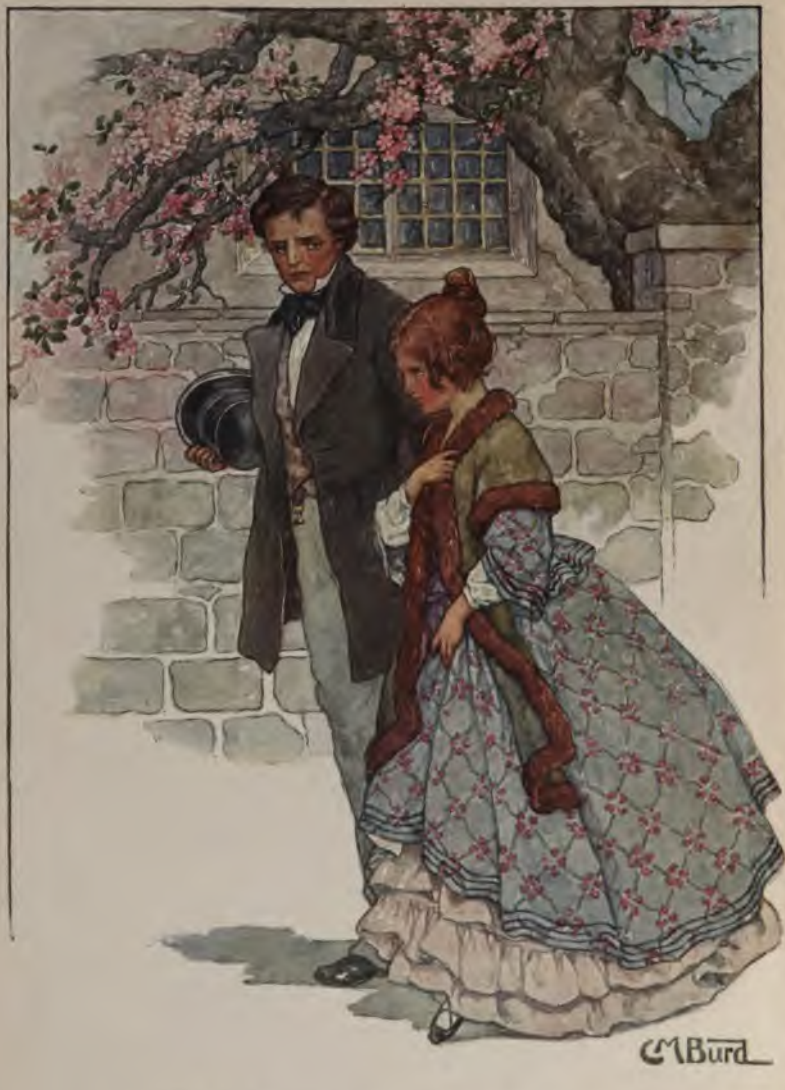

DR. MARK AND MRS. LATIMER

"Somebody said—I forget who it was—that if one had one's duty and a dream, one had enough for life."

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BY

S. G. TALLENTYRE

AUTHOR OF

"THE LIFE OF VOLTAIRE" "THE FRIENDS OF VOLTAIRE"

"THE LIFE OF MIRABEAU" ETC.

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BASSET

CHAPTER I

HARRY, THE SQUIRE

SOME seventy years ago, when that coarse, choleric, good-natured old gentleman, William IV., had just vacated the throne of Britain; when sanitation and popular education were not; when, with luck, one could still find noble lords to frank one's letters, and, without it, might still fight a duel or be imprisoned for debt; when the railway system was in its hopeful infancy, and the stage-coach in a vigorous old age; when Islington was a country suburb, and the only fault of Tottenham and Highgate was to be too remote and rural; when policemen were called "peelers," and omnibuses "shillibeers"; when all young men looked (only looked) immeasurably more serious and respectable than any young men do now; when young ladies bought, and wore on each side of the face, three little curls, and daily

ironed them out upon the kitchen table to keep them crisp and fresh; when a large public really supposed that in Mrs. Hemans and L.E.L. burnt the divine fire, and that "Thaddeus of Warsaw" was a work of genius;—in these darkly remote ages the village of Basset lay a hundred coach miles from London, five from the little town of Dilchester, and three from any other village. The word "lay" is used advisedly; for though Basset may be identified, it will not be found. In the old man one can indeed trace the boy; but, not the less, the boy—with the boy's spirit and the boy's heart—is gone for ever.

Basset had a much too large Norman church, which the piety of a châtelaine of Basset Manor—*tempus* George III.—had "improved" with two galleries.

Without the church was the village green, where the local louts mooned and spat on Sunday mornings during the service. On the green were the disused stocks, and a large slimy pond, which the village always drank and never connected with the typhus which, by some special dispensation of Providence, was not always epidemic.

Looking on to the green were some charm-

ingly picturesque, thatched cottages, with roses creeping up them, and within, too often, nameless vice and disease—the fruits of over-crowding. Then there was the dame school—which really did no harm; the public-house—which did a good deal—though it looked pastoral and guileless enough, with the old, smock-frocked Hodges smoking their long clay pipes and drinking their ale out of mugs, on the rude bench outside the door.

The doctor's low, red house had a flagged path up to it, and homely flowerbeds on either side of the path—tended by the doctor's good lady, with her skirt well pinned up, and an expression of dogged resolution upon her face. The very small, genteel, cottage near the doctor's—the obsolete and expressive word "genteel" was much in vogue then—belonged to Miss Pilkington, who was the daughter (of course) of a late Rector of Basset, who had lived very comfortably and hospitably, keeping his horses and carriages like a gentleman, and had left his daughters useless and portionless. The Rectory was a large, roomy place—rather sunless and damp, only nobody bothered about aspects in 1837—with a capital garden and a paddock.

On rising ground, looking down on the village, stood the low, rambling house that belonged to Sir John Railton, a real, live baronet, who used periodically to try to endure the quiet and tedium of Basset, invariably discover it was not to be done, let the Chantry, and return to Crockford's and Newmarket. A couple of prosperous farms —these were the days of Protection—also overlooked the village.

About half a mile from it—old, grey stone, Elizabethan—lay Basset Manor. It had a long row of sunny bedrooms and a cheerful parlour on its upper floor, and, on its lower, dark, oak-panelled living-rooms and vast, rambling kitchens. Without, there were first-rate stables, lawns and bowling-green, grass paths through the high-walled kitchen garden, and beds of untidy flowers. Here, the Squires of Basset had reigned since the days of Queen Anne, sometimes doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and sometimes that which was good, but more often doing nothing in particular, except enjoy themselves.

Just about the time of the demise of King William, young Harry Latimer attained his majority, and his mother, who had long

reigned, but not ruled, at Basset Manor, died.

From her portrait—that of a youngish woman, with a vague blue eye and a pretty, feeble face—it is easy to account for the lax, hospitable, happy-go-lucky character the Manor attained in her day; and also for a certain spoiled obstinacy which lay deep down in the character of her son.

Every person in Basset went into mourning when she died, and, of course, Harry and his household into the most lugubrious mourning of all. Then he set up to her memory in Basset church, just above the Manor pew, a huge and dreadful tablet, on which were inscribed, in the richest tombstone English, the virtues she had never possessed.

He used to read that inscription during the Morning Service for many Sundays after her death, with some emotion and a comfortable sense of having amply done his duty. After a while he gave it a bow of mental acknowledgment only; and at last entirely forgot its presence, and the colourless personality it commemorated; yawned rather obviously through the sermon, winked

a cheery blue eye at a friend in the gallery, and was himself again.

Presently he had a lively coming of age dinner-party at the Manor, and a headache next morning—and came into his own.

It is impossible to imagine a braver and jollier figure than Harry Latimer at one and twenty. With his fair head and ruddy English face, his well-set person, already inclining to a little stoutness, his capital seat on a horse, his first-rate animal spirits, his generous share of pluck and daring, and his love of sport and the open—he might have sat for the typical British country gentleman of that day, but that he was not sufficiently thick-headed.

True, Squire Harry never opened a book and only skimmed a newspaper, but he had a shrewd enough mind, though it was chiefly devoted to finding himself new pleasures. For this young gentleman had plenty of money for his amusements without working for it, and an estate which was not too extensive for a single agent to manage—or to mismanage—unassisted.

About ten, then, every day—except on a hunting morning—the Squire came down to his breakfast, opened the post-bag, threw the

bills on to a side-table, and screwed the moral advice from an aunt—his mother's elder and sterner sister—into a ball and aimed it neatly at the fire, or the fireplace. He spread open the little *Times*—yesterday's—on the sideboard, and gained an idea of its contents (which was all he wanted) as he cut himself cold beef.

His real interests were confined to Basset; as all Basset's real interests were in itself. Naturally, when one had to endure the long discomforts of a stage-coach, or the heavy expenses of posting, to reach one's relations, one seldom attempted to reach them; and when the recipient of their verbose, heavy-weighted letters had to pay the postage there was less than no inducement to keep up a correspondence. While, as for news from foreign countries, Harry, in common with many Englishmen of his class of that day, had never seen any, and despised them; honestly pitied benighted persons who spoke any language but his own; and had been taught by Mrs. Latimer that English would be the mother-tongue of heaven.

The agent, a thin-lipped and shifty-faced person, arrived before Harry had finished

his second cup of coffee. Those blue eyes of the Squire were by no means defective in penetration of character, but it would have been a confounded nuisance to be always suspecting everybody, so Harry comfortably assumed—on the principle of the negligent mother, who invariably finds paragons of nurses and governesses to do her own duty by her children—that the agent was honest and diligent, and listened with half an ear to his dull stories of land drainage and tumbling cottages.

Mr. Phillips had his morning dram; and sometimes Harry also—and Harry went out to the stables.

A love and a knowledge of horseflesh had been in the blood of the Latimers since Latimers there were. There was stabling for a dozen horses in the great stables of Basset Manor, and generally eight or ten in possession of them. The stalwart, handsome boy, with his beautiful roan mare, Victoria—his coming-of-age present to himself—nosing up to him for the contents of the breakfast sugar-basin, which he always prodigally emptied into his pocket, would have been a worthy subject for that very rising genius Mr. Landseer. The stables

were much the best kept part of Harry's household. The grooms and ostlers knew their master's knowledge of their business; and the extreme freedom of his expletives—a freedom he shared with better men than himself—kept them up to the mark.

In the garden he was frankly uninterested. Flowers were the business of women, and Harry would as soon have blacked his own boots as worked in his own garden. So he simply strolled round it, quite unobservant, with his couple of pepper-and-salt dandie pups at his heels. Sometimes he threw a silver fourpenny bit and a good-natured word to the dirty, grinning urchin who was sweeping up leaves, and who knew quite well that the fourpenny and the good-nature were dependent, not in the least on his own conduct, but entirely on his master's feelings at the moment.

As Harry's housekeeping consisted simply and entirely in sending the cook a glass of port when the dishes were good, and returning them with contumely to the kitchen when they were bad, it did not occupy much of his day; but occasionally the cook, a tall, thin lady, to whom her master would by no means have dared to give a *congé,* appeared in the

dining-room with a sheaf of bills, at the sum total of which Harry always grumbled, in the sanguine hope that the grumbling would reduce their amount for future occasions.

Then he played with the dandies, Dim and Tim, and wrote half a letter; played with the dandies again, tore up the half letter, and decided to write the whole to-morrow, and by that time Victoria was at the door. It was only on these leisurely non-hunting days that he had time to ride her easily along the narrow country lanes or the turnpike road to the five-mile distant market-town.

For Harry was the most regular, as he was the straightest rider to hounds in the county; the jolliest and most fearless, of a brave and jolly age, in the hunting-field. He was Master of the Hounds at one and twenty, and the Hunt breakfasts at Basset Manor in those days are still proudly remembered in the village. The garden-boy—he of the grin and the fourpence—is an old man now, and can still recall something of those fine, pleasant, chilly English mornings, with the men in pink, and the impatient dogs and horses, fretting to be gone, on the drive in front of the Manor windows.

On the excellent personal testimony of the kitchenmaid, sister to the garden boy, no other Hunt breakfast-table groaned under viands so many and costly as did Harry's. On the word of the county, he was one of the most popular Masters it ever knew, with his fair, flushed face, and his loud, good spirits; and yet, withal, taking his sport with the gravity and earnestness befitting an Englishman.

But on frosty days, or in the non-hunting season, Harry and Victoria—Dim and Tim having been left in tears in the dining-room—rode leisurely through Basset village.

All the smock-frocked Hodges greeted him as he went by, and were proud of such a well set-up young lord, and Harry had a salute, with his riding-whip, and a pleasant word for everybody. His heart and pocket were always open to the tales of woe the old grannies, with many an apologizing curtsey, stopped him to tell him. As he gave his guinea or his florin without investigating the story, he was immensely popular with those sufferers—the largest class—whose stories do not bear being pried into, and as he was irrevocably good-natured and incurably sanguine, he really had not the least

difficulty in honestly believing what he was told.

When, in one of his own outlying cottages—a most picturesque, rose-covered place, quite unfit for decent human habitation—a man lay dying of typhus, the Squire put a couple of bottles of port—the remedy in those days for every human ill—into the deep pockets of his riding-coat, and pleased the sufferer by the present far more than if he had rebuilt the cottage, whose insanitary condition, neither Harry nor, indeed, any one else held responsible for the suffering.

Sometimes, in the country lanes, he would meet old Dr. Benet, trotting calmly by in his gig. "Hie! doctor," says Harry, and bethinking himself that there is no time like the present, and that he *has* felt the most uncommon painful twinges in that left foot lately, pulls up, and takes a little "nonsense and advice."

To be sure, if the advice took the form, as it sometimes did (for Dr. Benet was perfectly honest as well as shrewd), of "patience and flannel," or a few glasses less in the evening, Harry changed the subject, waved his whip in a farewell salute, and remembered, as he rode off, the abysmal depths

of ignorance the faculty often displayed, and the ghastly mistakes the cleverest made at times, and had his usual quantity of port at night. Whereas, if Dr. Benet did not mention the port as a probable cause of the ailment, Harry comfortably considered it *might* be a cure—and had a couple of glasses extra.

Sometimes, for he was really exceedingly kind-hearted, he trotted around of an afternoon and paid his respects to Miss Pilkington, at the genteel cottage near the doctor's. She was tremblingly delighted at his visit—almost all old women loved Harry, and but too many young. He spread a zone of masculine largeness and untidiness in her narrow, prim parlour; and when she anxiously produced cake and wine—these were the dark ages before afternoon tea—he delighted her by finishing the whole cake with his healthy, young appetite, and swallowed a couple of glasses of her unique feminine brand of sherry wine as if he liked it. He further prescribed for her canary; it had lost all its feathers, and looked so undressed and indecent she had covered up its cage with a handkerchief, a proceeding which caused her guest to roar with laughter, and

enjoy himself vastly. When he went away, he seemed to take with him free air and the sunshine.

His visit, and the pleasant things it came naturally to him to say, lay warm about Rachel Pilkington's heart, and she did not know, or at least not for a long time, that with the Squire, as with many other people, out of sight was entirely out of mind, and that for him there was no such thing as a past or a future, but only the present moment.

Now and again, riding by the Rectory gate put him in mind of the grim old Parson, and he rode up to the windows of the study—falsely so called in this instance—and thumped on them with that ever-useful riding-crop.

The Parson was a straight shot, and had a military history before his clerical, so Harry could respect him, with self-respect. While, if church-going had been any passport to his favour, he should certainly have liked Harry, who was regular in attendance there, and if the sermon were less dull than usual, actually listened to it, with a hand on each knee, and a rather surprised expression of countenance; sang the psalm lustily, with

great enjoyment to himself; while once—at least once—when a young man from Dilchester had occupied the pulpit, and been very pathetic over a Ragged School, a close observer might have surprised a moisture in Harry's blue eyes.

If Harry's religion affected his emotions rather than his conduct, emotionalism is, after all, the whole religion of persons far more professedly devout than the Squire of Basset.

Perhaps as often as once a week, when there was nothing to hunt or shoot, Harry rode, or drove his phaeton—he was an adept at the ribbons—into Dilchester. There, he would stand about in the courtyard of the old inn, "The Case is Altered," and take bets with the other idlers (waiting, as he was, for the arrival of the coach from London) as to the probability of these new railroads, beginning to be opened all over the country, ousting the good old coaches out of it at last. Harry, who had on every subject that delightful facility for believing that what he did not wish could not possibly come to pass, quite refused to foresee the decline of horseflesh; so did the landlord, also a stout, sanguine person.

At last, with a fine cracking of whips, and a cheery noise and bustle, in comes the coach to a minute; the frozen passengers descended from the roof, and the asphyxiated ones inside were pulled out from masses of bags and bundles by the guard. The old coachman used to point out Harry to the passengers, with a sort of proprietary pride in him and his smart phaeton and cobs. Harry had an easy, all-men-are-equal air with the coachman, as he had with everybody; with the landlord's arch and ogling daughter, and the ostler, whom he had just damned impatiently for some neglect of duty. The parcels of things he had ordered from London—a fine new coat from the crack tailor in Jermyn Street among them—were packed into the phaeton; Harry drove off; and the idlers looked after him, and envied, and lazily admired him.

Not seldom of an evening there was a jolly bachelor party at Basset Manor.

At half-past five, Harry and a half a dozen neighbouring squires sat down to dine —and were still sitting at half-past eight. Intoxication as a fashionable vice had passed, or was fast passing, away, and Harry and his friends were certainly not intoxicated.

But the quantity they drank would as certainly suffice to lay their degenerate grandsons under the table; and that the liveliness of the parties was largely born of the bottle need not be denied. Tim, the smaller dandie, used to search on the floor, lest the revellers should luckily and inadvertently have dropped anything toothsome. Dim would sit on the hearth, with his vast, wide head very much on one side, gravely considering the lords of creation enjoying their noble and rational pleasures.

Occasionally, the party played cards; once they stole out and caught a couple of poachers, red-handed, in the very act, in Harry's modest preserves.

Of course, Harry cursed the offenders at the moment, and, equally of course, let them off in the sequel; a prosecution being such a confounded lot of trouble! But though Harry seldom took any except for his pleasures, it must be accounted to him for righteousness that for them he took often a very great deal, that he enjoyed with a refreshing heartiness and simplicity, and was neither bored nor fastidious in his amusements. If the Basset dinner-table was overladen, it may be remembered that its

host had often been walking all day among the turnips, with a shooting lunch consisting of absolutely nothing but a hunch of bread and cheese, stuffed into his pocket. He would drive himself a dozen miles in his phaeton to a dinner-party in the teeth of a black North-Easter; and it is certainly on record that one eventful night, in a bitter midwinter, muffled to the eyes, he rode to Dilchester to the assembly ball, through the deepest snow of years.

The ball-room was uncomfortably stuffy and crowded when he got there; wax candles in great glass lustres lit the scene, and often shed showers of wax over the good-tempered dancers; the fiddlers in a gallery made up in energy what they lacked in tune and time, and the supper was principally distinguished by an untidy plenty. But what did that matter? Harry was the best dancer and the handsomest man in the room; and a steward presently introduced him to Miss Mary Matthews, of Clayton Hall, near Dilchester, aged eighteen, and vastly enjoying herself at her very first ball, under the fond and strict chaperonage of a mother in a cap and a grey silk gown, sitting on a daïs and watching, not the party, but Mary at it.

Pollie was a very slight little creature, not really pretty, but with such bright curls and such a bright face that she conveyed an impression of prettiness. The family history records that she was dressed in white muslin —which was then not simply a synonym for the obsolete virtues, but a stiff fabric actually worn by young women at balls. Her feet beneath it, in the satin slippers she had made herself, were aching to be dancing and off. Harry loved, first, her freshness and vigour, her *naïf* and new delight in the party and in life; and she loved Harry—principally because she was at the age to love somebody, and so far had scarcely spoken a dozen times to any man under fifty except her writing-master, who had been twice widowed, and was of a homely, eruptive countenance.

Let it be added that Pollie was now, as she was ever, a most generous, candid, quick-tempered, honourable and intelligent little person, with her bright wits certainly not stifled by study, and with a mind and heart, like the age in which she lived, full of beginnings and possibilities.

She danced all the dances with Harry she could, with Madam—herself aged about

thirty-eight, but feeling and seeming older than a woman of sixty does now—conscientiously regarding her from the daïs. At the end of the evening—an immensely long evening, and seeming so dreadfully short!—it was Harry who handed Madam and Pollie to their landau, with old John-Coachman, in his flaxen wig, and with his fat, friendly face smiling from his box at our Miss and the good-looking Squire in his swallow-tails and the handsomest waistcoat the eye of man ever saw.

It was Harry who, the very next day, sat down to compose a most serious letter—making savage threats of kicking Dim and Tim when they interrupted him—in which he set forth in very manly terms the state of his heart and his fortune, and begged the leave of her mother to pay his addresses to Miss Mary Matthews *at once*.

Miss Mary Matthews being fatherless, her mother had to take counsel with a pompous and worldly uncle, with a stock and fob, who looked very sharply and narrowly into Harry's money affairs, and piously hoped for the best regarding Harry's character, or shared the common, convenient belief that men "for the most, become much more the better

for being a little bad." Then the Squire rode over to Clayton Hall on Victoria, and some very thin excuse about the character of a housemaid; and Pollie came out to the door, with the curls shading a very becoming blush, gave Victoria some sugar, and heard something, in spite of the curls, that Harry bent over to say in her ear.

After that, came a solemn dinner—a *partie carrée* at Clayton Hall—when the uncle and Mrs. Matthews sustained a dull conversation *à deux,* and Harry and Pollie tried hard to catch glimpses of each other round the great épergne containing trifle, which occupied the middle of the table. The next day Harry brought Pollie a little pearl ring. The two were alone together perhaps three hours—for three minutes a time—during their courtship.

Once, indeed, Harry drove Pollie and her mother over to Basset Manor, and announced his lovelorn and philistine intention of building Pollie a sham Gothic arbour in the garden, and replacing the excellent old Georgian furniture in the drawing-room with a suite in rosewood and crimson satin; and on this occasion the pair were actually in sole possession of each other for half an

hour, while Madam Matthews went to inspect the linen cupboards. But what use was half an hour, with Harry bewitched and intoxicated with Pollie's extreme vivacity, and Pollie in love with love?

Presently, Madam, who was nothing if not good and conscientious, made her daughter sit down with her and sew at a most excellent, serviceable trousseau, and, as they worked, set forth to the spirited Pollie the "mild and compliant mind" the ideal wife always exhibited.

Finally, there was a wedding, with the bells ringing, and all Dilchester *en fête;* a wedding-breakfast, with speech-making and incessant health-drinkings; and at last the phaeton and that pair of spanking cobs at the door, the luggage strapped up at the back, the bridegroom in his great, caped driving-coat, the bride with her face blooming and glowing under a beaver bonnet, the cobs dancing to be off—shoes, rice, cheers—and Harry and Pollie had driven—into futurity.

CHAPTER II

HARRY'S WIFE

In the archives of Clayton Hall, there was found the other day the little packet of letters the new Mrs. Latimer wrote to her mother on her wedding trip. Does any bride out of a book declare in such letters whether she is happy or unhappy during these momentous weeks? Certainly not any bride with the strong good sense of Pollie.

The first letter described the journey by phaeton to London, and the sights there; how Harry had shown Pollie, Tattersall's, and the new National Gallery in the place where the old King's Mews used to be; and, best of all, that good, wise, resolute little Queen, riding of an afternoon with Lord Melbourne. Next, Harry took Pollie their first trip in a steam carriage on one of the new railroads, and Pollie, much impressed, wrote of the "surprising velocity" of the motion. (It was to some purpose, after all, she had composed a pattern epistle

three times a week in the schoolroom to an imaginary correspondent.)

After London, the pair—knowing and content to know, that this was the trip of their lives, and that, once back in Basset, Dilchester would be almost their furthest limit—crossed the Channel and posted to Paris. From there, Pollie wrote her intention of embroidering Harry a beautiful waistcoat in fuchsias—the waistcoat to come as an entire surprise to him, and so only to be worked when he was out. A subtle observer might have drawn deductions from the fact that just a fortnight later the waistcoat was announced as finished.

Finally, the couple recrossed the Channel—six hours in the packet-boat in the teeth of a contrary wind—rejoined the cobs and phaeton, and went a tour round the cathedral cities of England. By cathedral III—Lincoln—Harry had sworn off cathedrals entirely and for ever, and had gone to a horse-show instead; but Pollie conscientiously sketched nearly all of them, not worrying about perspective, but achieving results at least showing grip and spirit.

The subtle observer might again have made deductions, not only from the number

of the sketches, but from the length of time and the undivided attention evidently bestowed upon each of them.

Just three months after the wedding-day, Basset, having erected a triumphal arch with a very intoxicated-looking "Welcome" in cotton-wool on it, mustered its whole population in its one street, and cheered the bride and bridegroom as Harry drove the phaeton to the Manor. He looked his ever-jolly, robust, good-natured self, and the bride seemed the merest slip of a bright-eyed little girl beside him. Miss Pilkington, having punctiliously paid her wedding call at the Manor two days later, shook her kind head, and said she *hoped*—meaning she did not think—so gay a creature could be fit for the responsibilities of marriage.

Yet it may be that, even on their wedding journey, Pollie had, very dimly, begun to realize that there might be drawbacks for the wife in the happy temperament of a husband who was so incapable of believing anything but the best that he never prepared for the worst; and that if he was always careless, it might behove her to be more than commonly careful. Still, it was a very eager and trusting Pollie who had come back

to the Manor, quite ready to believe that any little disillusions of the wedding journey were due to her, as yet, necessarily imperfect understanding of the nature and constitution of man.

She had been excellently well taught by her mother—then absent in the West of England nursing a sick sister—to tackle man's domestic difficulties for him.

Harry thought Pollie looked uncommonly pretty—and so she did—with a housekeeping apron pinned to her very slender bodice, and with the heavy household keys in a great pocket, when she went off after breakfast their first morning at Basset Manor for a preliminary engagement with Harry's cook. He looked up from pulling Tim's ears and laughed at her alert and business-like air, and said he shouldn't advise her to bother herself over old Jones, as Jones always had done just what she liked and always would; and Pollie, who had been told that it was her duty to make her dependents do theirs, said, "Not with me, Harry," with such a fine determination, that Harry laughed the more. However, Mrs. Jones, who was nearly a foot taller than her mistress, and could have picked her up in one hand and shaken her,

very soon became mild and apologetic under Pollie's fearless and truthful eyes, and learnt to clean and tremble.

Harry gave Pollie quite large sums of money, at quite uncertain intervals, by way of making a housekeeping allowance, and though the sums were, at first, far more generous than was necessary, and Pollie perched a kiss on the top of his head in grateful acknowledgment of them, she was aware all the same that this was not, so to speak, the way to do business.

When she dismissed an artful housemaid, who had gauged her master's character and taken advantage of his convenient habit of shutting his eyes to everything that was awry, Harry was much less pleased. Jane had made him very comfortable and had seemed all right, so of course she *was* all right! In fact, Harry's theory was that, since reformation was always resented by the reformees and made the reformer deucedly unpopular, why reform? Pollie, on the other hand, had always been given to understand that to do nothing is often to do wrong. She looked up at Harry—they were sitting together after dinner on an evening a few weeks after they came home—and returned

to the bright-coloured wool-work antimacassar she was making, without saying anything.

In the mornings, she used to walk round the garden with him, in the little, thin, inadequate black satin boots in which the women of that epoch followed their lords through the rough places of the world with a courage and spirit their stoutest-shod sisters of to-day have not exceeded. Harry was not wholly pleased with her when she noticed the immense discrepancy between the seeds and bulbs bought and the flowers raised. But, as he had really rather desired the end, though not enough himself to take the means, he was quite pleased when, in the sequel, the florist's bills were few and the flowers many.

Soon, the Manor gave the first of several large and solemn dinner-parties to the other manors and halls of the neighbourhood, and Harry was wholly delighted with the ponderous excellence of the feast Pollie and Mrs. Jones had been busily preparing since nine o'clock in the morning.

No husband—certainly not such a new and good-natured one as Harry—could have failed to admire the wife he caught sight of at times round the silver candelabra and the piled-up dishes set out on the table. Even a

trousseau-frock of a heavy silk of a crude mild-blue, could not take away the colour and brightness from Pollie's face; as the fact that she knew very little could not take away the natural intelligence of her conversation. The knighted Mayor of Dilchester, who was her neighbour, was quite delighted with her, and told Harry over the wine afterwards what a lucky man he was. Perhaps, as Harry was passing, quite gradually, to the more normal marital attitude of feeling that Pollie was a lucky woman, the information did no harm.

In the drawing-room, when all the rest of the company had made music after tea—everybody sang and played in those days, nobody very badly and nobody very well—Harry roared out to Pollie's accompaniment the jovial history of Captain Wattle, "who was all for love and a little for the bottle"; and then one of the comic songs from the "Vocal Library," a song with that obvious and primitive wit—the wit of the practical joke and the pun—which has long ceased to amuse. It amused that simpler and cheerful company, however.

Harry and Pollie's dinner-parties, having begun at half-past five, did not break up till

ten. It was not to their inordinate length that sensible Pollie ascribed Harry's crossness the next morning. She accepted man—as most of the women round her had to accept him—as a creature who, though certainly no longer drinking to intoxication, yet on festive occasions necessarily saw the world much *en rose* at the moment, and much *en noir* the next day. When Harry kicked Dim, not at all severely, when Dim unwittingly got in his way, and Dim, offended more than hurt, rubbed his face against Pollie's frock asking an explanation, Pollie, stroking the large head, whispered to him that this was one of the small things of life, which he and she must not mind.

To be sure, it was also a small thing that Harry, having very generously bestowed trifling weekly pensions on some old folks in the village, invariably forgot to pay them; and that, having faithfully promised Mr. Phillips to come and inspect the roof of some distant cottage, he scarcely ever remembered the promise; and Polly, inventing a pudding, was constantly being called away from her duties to see to Harry's, Harry being out shooting (it was now early autumn) with a neighbouring squire.

It was also a small thing that Harry put off answering his letters until his correspondents wrote to inquire of Pollie if he were dead; that he stuffed business communications into his pockets, and gaily ignored their existence; and that he was always meaning to order hoes and rakes for the gardeners, and never doing it.

Still, to every hundred persons who can bear with courage the blows of Fate, there is about one who can equably support her slaps. Pollie was astonished to find such trifles could annoy her; when Harry saw she was annoyed, and offered her a new lace tippet from London to make up, Pollie, conscientiously refusing the tippet because there were already three in her trousseau, came to Harry all the same and, laying her soft and glowing cheek against his, said that she had not meant to be cross.

It was Harry's turn to be a little cross presently, when the weather turned wet and the gout in his toe kept him to the house for a few days.

He was not a person of resources, and it was naturally a little annoying to him to find that Pollie was; for to see others contented with things that do not content one's self,

is seldom pleasing. When the household duties were done, Pollie found footstool-covers positively calling out to be beaded; and sat, looking very pretty and quite absorbed in her occupation, by Harry's side. Then, one day, hobbling into the library on the foot he had been expressly forbidden to put to the ground, he found his wife on the top of the steps by one of the great book-cases, wholly and entirely absorbed in the *Spectator* of Joseph Addison. Harry, never reading himself, entertained a dark suspicion that there was something a little unfeminine about a woman who could not rest satisfied with Miss Ferrier's "Destiny," Heath's "Book of Beauty," and the illustrations in Thomson's "Castle of Indolence"—all adorning the drawing-room table.

Pollie, still holding Mr. Addison, came down the steps slowly at Harry's call. Her straightforward mind could not see any reason why she should not read the *Spectator* because it bored Harry. But remembering the softness and the meekness which were the ideal wifely virtues, she, with an effort, did not say so.

The very next day, she herself readjusted, as it were, the intellectual balance between

the sexes by driving the lady's phaeton—Harry had given it to her, and was teaching her to handle the ribbons—into a ditch, and by inquiring at dinner, with that perfectly cheerful candour which always distinguished her, if Lord Melbourne were a Whig or a Tory.

Still, when Harry was about again, Pollie often found her way to the old book-cases, and sitting on those steps, with her small white-stockinged, sandalled feet dangling, discovered, to her great good fortune, that Jane Porter and "The Songs of the Affections" did not form the sum total of English literature.

One brilliant morning of early September, the post-bag, arriving at breakfast, was found to contain a solid and lengthy communication from Harry's lawyer at Dilchester about a property to which Harry was a trustee. He threw the letter over to Pollie, not because he supposed she understood business, but because he was just going out to a neighbour for a day's partridge-shooting, and did not want to bother about it himself. Pollie read it while Harry was putting on his shooting boots and playing with the dogs.

"Mr. Rastrick wants to see you at once—

to-day, Harry," she said. "He says the business is very important, and 'if not attended to,'" reads Pollie from the letter, "'might result in a very serious loss.'"

"Fudge!" says Harry, pulling on the second boot. "Old Rastrick's always fussing about something."

"It does seem serious, Harry," answers Pollie, still reading the letter; "he says again it is most expedient he should see you to-day."

"Then he won't," replies Harry, with his jolly laugh. "Here, throw it over to me, Pollie, and don't frown like that. Women never ought to interfere in business." With that, Harry, having impatiently read the paper himself, threw it into a drawer in his writing-table, and, whistling cheerfully, went out to the hall-door to see if Victoria had been brought round.

The sun was streaming pleasantly into the dining-room, but for the moment the world did not look gay to Pollie. "As this may be a serious matter, not for you and your wife only, but for your children hereafter," Mr. Rastrick had written—and Harry did not find it worth the sacrifice of a day's pleasure!

Pollie's eyes were still thoughtful when she came out to the door to see him off. He

looked so hearty and vigorous, as he flung himself into the saddle, so full of youth and life, it was inspiriting to see him. Just as he was starting, he turned to Pollie, to hope good-naturedly she would not be dull, and to suggest that if she were, she should ask old Pil (thus Harry abbreviated the representative of the house of Pilkington) to spend the afternoon with her.

About a week later, there came another solemn communication from Mr. Rastrick, expressing surprise that he had heard nothing from his client on the important business of which he had written to him, but adding that the matter had turned out less serious than he had anticipated, and, he believed, would be settled satisfactorily.

"I told you so!" says Harry, pulling one of Pollie's little curls—in her case, they were her own, growing on her head—and Pollie found herself in the rather annoying, but not uncommon, position of being forgiven—for having been perfectly right.

That day seemed to her to mark an era. Certainly, after it, Harry's faults often came up before the bar of her righteous young judgment, and received scant mercy there; and she forgot that in the days when Harry used

to ride from Basset to Clayton Hall to woo her, it was his very *insouciance* and sanguineness which used to make her home seem dull and everybody in it so old when he had gone away.

Sometimes now, they even had small disputes—over some household matter at breakfast-time, perhaps. Pollie began her housekeeping—with the keys and the pinafore—sore and troubled. When, with very great difficulty and in a few hours' time, she had brought her high spirit to apology and contrition, she was met with the blank wall of the fact that Harry had totally and utterly forgotten, not only the nature of the offence, but that there had been one at all.

But sometimes there were graver things—"on n'a qu'à glisser pour faire mal." Harry's lazy good-nature occasionally led him into small predicaments, from which the easiest way out was a by-path from the truth. The wondering honesty of Pollie's eyes was quite lost on him. One day, alas! she tried a small shaft of contempt, and it glanced off him easily, doing neither harm nor good. As for detecting that everything was not perfectly right, if Harry did detect it, being an entirely practical person, he would simply have

said that of course no one could go on honeymooning for ever.

Certainly, if troubles there were, Pollie had the best of remedies for them—plenty to do. Because one's heart aches, is no reason the plums should not be made into jam; and whether one is happy or unhappy, the house-linen will not count and mend itself.

In the evenings, after dinner, Harry used to have his wine brought into the red-satin drawing-room, and enjoyed it, sitting before the fire, while Pollie sang to him. She used to sing nearly every evening, her répertoire being quite limited—

> "I'd be a butterfly! living a rover,
> Dying when fair things are fading away;"

and a very long ballad, describing minutely the five inadequate reasons why the hero Never Said He Loved, until verse six, when, with several passionately tremulous chords, he at last expressed his feelings.

By this climax, despite the chords, Harry was generally asleep. Pollie, with her hands resting on the keyboard, could see him from where she sat: with his goodly, fair head thrown back on the chair, and self-indulgence

marking—it had not yet marked—its obvious lines on his boyish face. Dim—Tim was asleep like his master—would rise slowly sometimes from the hearthrug, and come to Pollie to inquire if this was by any chance a trouble a lick could heal.

Then tea was brought in, at half-past eight, and when Pollie had brewed it, taking a great deal of interest in the process, it was her custom to sit on one of those beaded footstools by Harry's side, and drink her cup with her head resting against his knee.

At first, she had been used to talk to him about the things which had been in her mind in the day, or her new *naïf* experiences of life. While on all material questions Harry was perfectly shrewd and sensible, the world of abstract ideas had absolutely no existence for him—though, after all, it was not ideas which Pollie's developing heart missed, but ideals. She sat there for a long time, looking into the red hollows of the fire, and seeing there, perhaps, Harry's shortcomings and not her own. She had been too fond of him to be merciful to them.

Some chance remark he made about happening to have met her that night of the Dilchester ball, seemed to say that if he had not

met her, he would have met some one else, who would have done as well. Harry, to be sure, had not meant that, or meant anything. He rested the *Globe* which he was reading on Pollie's head; and under that canopy her pretty face took a strange sadness, and she began to think—a dangerous thought—how much she would have kept if, when they were still only lovers, Harry had been taken away from her; for she guessed already that, beside the loss of illusion, the losses of death might be kind.

Harry's laugh roused her with a start; he read aloud something out of the paper—one of those cheerfully blatant sarcasms in which the press of that day indulged.

Presently, Pollie got up to snuff the candles, shaking herself morally the while. What a fool she was! what a wicked fool! Soft, persuasive, amiable—how short she fell of that accepted, wifely standard! Yet, the very next morning, when she did try the art of coaxing to make Harry sit down and pay his bills, or keep some long-neglected promise, she found, as she was always finding, that though he seemed to yield to her at the time, he did nothing, and next day they were back at exactly the same place again—the finger

removed, the indiarubber ball resumed its original and incurable shape.

In the very few novels Pollie had been permitted to read, when the heroine was not discreetly left at the church door, her children settled and simplified for her all the difficulties of life.

When, in that winter, her small, stalwart son was born, with Harry's English blue eyes and fair hair, and a distinct likeness in his crumpled red face to Harry's out-of-door complexion, she made quite sure this convenient rule was going to apply to her.

Harry was certainly the proudest and most affectionate of fathers, and took an even greater interest in the surprising girth of Tommy's legs than did that comfortable, ignorant, motherly old woman who was Pollie and Tommy's nurse. No father ever dug an infant in the ribs with more hilarious results than Harry. The heir nearly gurgled and laughed himself into a fit when Harry gently winked his cheerful eye at him, or softly touched him—Tommy rolling at his ease on the hearth-rug—with the toe of a shooting boot. Presently, he preferred the sight of his father's jolly face even to the delicious amusement of pulling his mother's

curls as if they were a bell-rope. Harry talked loudly of his son's perfections when he met the other squires in the field, and they laughed at him, and liked him better for his *naïf* delight in his new toy.

A toy—a really valuable toy, but for whose preservation he was not in the least responsible—that is what Pollie, sitting with the child on her lap, and looking over his downy light head into the fire, very soon came to the conclusion that Harry regarded their son.

Of course, it was only natural and manlike that when Tommy became fractious or boring, Harry should precipitately resign him to his mother, and that when, on the mere suspicion of a cry upstairs of an evening, she fled in its direction as if she had been shot out of a cannon, Harry should observe lazily that he was certain she need not bother, it was sure to be all right; which, of course, it always was. It was natural, too, that Pollie and not Harry should be anxious over passing infantile complaints—in this day scientifically assigned to flies in the milk, and in that to the direct Hand of God. But was it natural, Pollie asked herself, that when, in that hour after dinner, as they sat talking over their tea, she

tentatively spoke of Tommy's education and future, Harry should obviously regard the subject as a dull one, which did not in any way concern him, and remarked indolently that of course Tommy would get along somehow? That was just, in fact, what that resolute little mother of his did not mean him to do. She meant to put forth her very best efforts to help him to get along well.

She was sitting in her usual attitude at that hour, with her head against Harry's knee, and for the first time was conscious that she disliked the touch of his fingers on the softness of her cheek and neck. Harry-like, he did not even observe that she shrank from him, and, when the next night she took a chair opposite him instead of her footstool, to which she returned no more, noticed no change at all.

The child, indeed, whom she had made so ignorantly certain was to draw her to Harry, more deeply divided them. Pollie, whose *vive* nature had been angry, but angry only, at Harry's casual affection and indifference for herself, felt passionate resentment that he should mete the same feelings to the child. She turned away her head now even when the pair were at play, as if something in the

sight hurt her. When, one night, she did bring Harry to speculate—half jocularly—on Tommy's future, it was but to know, what she had so far only suspected, that she and Harry had not an idea in common, and that, if Tommy's upbringing was not to be wholly harmful, she must be always counteracting Harry's influence. In a minute his head was behind the *Globe* again, and he was whistling softly as he read. On to Pollie's little bare hand with the wedding-ring on it there splashed, to her surprise and resentment, a sudden tear.

It being the shooting season, Harry, of course, was constantly out.

As women then never followed the guns, and as they walked little and played no outdoor games, for open-air exercises only riding and driving remained, and though Pollie was learning, she had not yet learnt those arts. So she had only the occupations of indoors—where the small troubles of life always loom large. Harry's idiosyncrasies, which had annoyed her at breakfast, came up, unforbidden, before her mind in the long, solitary hours.

Yesterday, she had lit again, by chance, on one of his lazy lies, and knew that he was

neither troubled at it nor at being found out in it.

To-day—sitting in the nursery sewing clothes for Tommy, and looking above his sleeping head at the dripping window-pane, where "rain and wind beat dark December" —it seemed to her that since her marriage she had been always accepting lowered standards, or quarrelling with Harry, in itself a lowering thing, for the better ones she knew. A revolt against him and against fate, a sudden, strong tempest of hatred, took possession of her. She took Tommy from her lap into her arms, and held him so tightly to her heart—in a fierce determination he should have neither lot nor part with his father—that Tommy woke up, screamed indignation at such treatment, and old Mrs. Chinnery came in from the next room to see if her charge were being murdered.

All that week Pollie was very silent. But Harry, who always volubly filled in all pauses himself, noticed nothing.

At church, on the Sunday, the sermon chanced to be on the Forgiveness of Injuries, and Harry, who had never borne any living soul a grudge for more than five minutes, listened moved and attentive, while Pollie,

staring absently under her bonnet at old Mrs. Latimer's monument, did not hear a word from beginning to end.

At the five o'clock Sunday dinner she hardly roused herself to make the ordinary observations, or to answer Harry's. She was dreaming deeply—not without a gloomy pleasure in her own vindictive imaginings—of a Harry, ill or troubled, whom she would by no means succour or solace. She looked at his good-natured face across the dishes of wintry pears and grapes—he was enjoying his Sunday claret (the best bin) in perfect contentment—and believed that she hated him. From force of habit, through all her distress and bitterness, she kept on absently anointing the joint in front of her with the gravy—to keep the goodness in it—and no wretchedness of spirit could prevent her from mentally noting presently that Mrs. Jones had insufficiently browned the pudding.

In the drawing-room, she and Harry both produced books suitable for the day. Everybody then read, or pretended to read, sermons on Sunday, and if Harry's chosen discourse on the Plagues of Egypt fell off his knee before he had reached the end of the first paragraph, and his head dropped back

in the chair with his mouth open, the general opinion would certainly have been that he did much better to sleep over a pious work than to keep awake over a secular.

Pollie's sermon on Sodom and Gomorrah lay unnoticed on her knee, and she gazed past Harry's sleeping form, with her pretty eyes blank and sad, into the future. If only there were a future for her! If only she had known—in time—what life and love and marriage meant!

The regular breathing of Dim and Tim, as they lay stretched in their after-dinner sleep on the hearth-rug, made a monotonous accompaniment to her thoughts. She was so profoundly absorbed in them that even a cry in the nursery overhead passed unheard.

Five minutes later there was the report of a gun—apparently quite close to the windows—which brought the four occupants of the drawing-room to their feet in a second. In a dozen more, Harry had *his* gun, and was ready to go in quest of the poacher, with his blue eyes eager and alert, agog for a fray, and bidding Pollie hold back Dim and Tim. She called out to him from the hearth-rug, where she had each dog by his collar, in a phrase she

had used a hundred times before, "Take care of yourself, Harry!"

When she could hear his footsteps no more, and the dogs were quieter—only murmuring excitement and disappointment occasionally, as she sat between them on the floor—the phrase came back to her mind.

If he *did* take care of himself, there were twenty, thirty, forty years she must spend at his side, the spirit always subdued to the flesh, herself slipping into his likeness, and—far worse—seeing Tommy slip into it too. If he never came back, she would be free to lead her own life, with the child—to find, perhaps, the happiness she had missed! She began to see what she had missed. In books, poachers shot tyrannical landowners. Even Pollie—in her absorbed bitterness—had to smile at the thought of the much too easy-going Harry as a tyrant. But it was only in books! Because she knew such a catastrophe was so exceedingly unlikely to happen, she believed that she actually wished it to-night. And suddenly, with a guilty start, she became aware of Dim, sitting up with his ridiculous head exceedingly on one side, contemplating her gravely, as if he knew what was in her mind.

On the morrow, Harry did not get up. He felt ill—a chill, perhaps, from chasing the poacher. He grumbled a good deal and made great havoc of his bed-clothes. Pollie went down to her store-room and looked out the three household remedies which her mother had assured her the prudent housewife had always at hand—arnica, colchicum for the gout, and sal volatile. As the arnica announced itself on the bottle to be intended for bruises and outward application, and Harry had no bruises, it was manifestly unsuitable. So Pollie tried the colchicum—gout takes all forms, and Harry might be suffering from one of them; and then, in case it was not the gout after all, the sal volatile.

Harry said he felt worse when he had imbibed these remedies, and rather crossly suggested—everybody believed piously and faithfully in the curative properties of medicine then—that they were stale. Pollie shook her head and curls, and sat on the edge of the bed, regarding Harry attentively. He did not look ill; the outdoor tan on his face had not faded at all. Her own experience of sickness was limited to an attack of measles at twelve years old; she tried to remember what she had felt like on that important occasion, and

could not. She brought Harry some soup and wine and the newspaper, and resumed her household duties.

When she came up to him a little later, he was still tossing untidily and unhappily, and declared himself to be in considerable pain. Pollie suggested she should send John for Dr. Benet. Her ignorance was in no way alarmed. To it, death was still a name, not a reality; a thing which had removed King William IV. and sometimes an old uncle or a cousin—her father had died in her infancy—but had never come so near to her that she had learnt either to dread or to recognize it.

Harry was not sure whether he would see old Benet, or whether he would not. Doctors were such asses! Harry, in point of fact, had several shooting engagements that week, and had not quite decided whether old Benet would cure him in time for them, or maliciously prevent him from fulfilling them.

He dozed restlessly in the afternoon. It was six o'clock before John left the Manor, and nearly eight before Dr. Benet reached it. He wheezed asthmatically up the stairs alone—he was very fat and short. Harry had been annoyed with Pollie for standing

at the end of his four-poster, looking at him and inquiring if he were better, and had bidden her to go downstairs. Dr. Benet was overhead a long while, creaking about noisily, doing a good deal, it seemed to Pollie listening below, but not talking much. When at last he came heavily downstairs again, Pollie, with her work still in her hand, went to the drawing-room door to meet him, asked cheerfully how Harry was, and if he would be out of bed to-morrow.

There was a look on old Benet's homely face that seemed to her to make her heart give a sudden leap and then stand still. But self-control had been part of her training, and it did not fail her. The wool-work dropped out of her hands, but she stooped, picked it up, folded it, and laid it by on a table, before she shut the door and came back to the hearth where the doctor was standing.

He must not disguise from her that this was a very serious thing, and that he did not like the look of the patient at all. Every one, to his misfortune, knows those time-honoured formulas, the same seventy, or seven hundred, years ago. Dr. Benet wrote a note to a colleague in Dilchester—a note

summoning him to come at once—which John must ride hard and deliver. He gave Pollie some directions. She was intelligent; that he had always guessed from her face. He took hold of her slim hand, hanging at her side—it was as cold as a stone—and patted it kindly between his own fat, red, old paws, and said there was no need to lose hope, Harry had the finest of constitutions. As he rode away from the Manor, he recalled something in her expression, and wondered that the Squire, who was handsome enough certainly to please any woman's fancy, was quite the man to have inspired so profound and passionate a feeling.

When he had gone, Pollie stood for a moment by the hall-door, which she had opened, thinking.

Les désirs accomplis! Out of her exceedingly limited acquaintance with the French language that little phrase came back to her, followed her upstairs to Harry's room, and drummed in her ears above the high-sounding phrases in which Dr. Clarke from Dilchester, presently retrieved by John, tried to hide his ignorance and his anxiety.

Les désirs accomplis! The words still throbbed in her mind as she sat the remainder

of the night in Harry's room. Gamps were the only sick nurses of that date, and, naturally, households like Pollie's would have none of them. She had wished Harry dead; and he was dying. By the light of the candle and her own accusing soul, he looked far more ill and sunken than he really was. She would have her wish, as a judgment: This you desired; take it—to your lifelong regret.

When "the still morn went out with sandals grey," and Pollie peeped again through Harry's bed-curtains, he was asleep; and so sound asleep, for one dreadful moment she thought her punishment had come.

Dr. Benet, arriving an hour or two later, considered his patient a something, though but a trifle, better.

But there were still many days of gnawing anxiety—or alternations of hope and fear not less cruel—when Pollie believed her desire had been heard in Heaven, by the just and avenging God of the Old Testament lessons of her childhood. She had what is called no time to think, but she had time and to spare to find out that the burden refused can weigh heavier than the burden borne; and that though, in her marriage, she had made one of the most fatal of human mistakes, there

was one greater and more fatal—rebellion against its consequences.

The beautiful quiver of the most nourishing of all possible calf's-foot jelly, which she had made with her own eager hands, and the perfect greaselessness and potency of the beef-tea, expressed her repentance. She would most thankfully have gone down on her knees and scrubbed the floor of Harry's bedroom, if the medical science of her age had demanded such hygienic precautions—which it certainly did not. As it was, she satisfied its requirements, and a little comforted her self-accusing soul, by piling up the patient's fire, and excluding oxygen from his room with so much fervour and thoroughness that only that natural excellence of constitution, on which old Benet was pinning his faith, could have made him weather her devotion. In the cold dawn of many mornings, Harry saw her little figure, in the simplest and neatest of wrappers, and with her curls appearing below a small, frilled nightcap, standing inside his bed-curtains, bringing him cups of nourishment.

When, after many days, he began to be annoyed with her for always remembering to give him his medicines—they were most

numerous and nauseous—a weight seemed to be lifted from her heart. He had been so ominously meek and grateful!

No good woman ever thanked Providence so fervently to hear a little bad language as Pollie, when Harry showed his renewed vigour by energetically damning all drugs and the entire medical profession. He asked for Tim, and Pollie's housewifely soul made no account of paw-marks on the spotlessness of the counterpane; and for Tommy, and Pollie was not even hurt when he was quite disproportionately annoyed at the child for crying at his haggard, changed face. In her remorse—though at its bitterest she knew very well that she loved every hair which composed the down on Tommy's head (called curls by Pollie and Mrs. Chinnery) better than Harry's whole body—she hardly allowed herself to see the child at all.

Harry recovered, chiefly because he had always been firmly convinced that it was perfectly impossible for him to do anything else. He came downstairs again, not at all a changed man, but precisely the same man he had gone up; and Pollie, not substantially a different woman, resumed her life with him.

Only now, since she had wished him dead

and he had nearly died, the sense of her own failings made her merciful to his. Sometimes, when he annoyed or wounded her, she would go into the drawing-room, and, looking up at his mother's picture, tell herself that for the son of that feebly good-natured person, with her pleasant, watery smile, the allowances should indeed be great. When he offered her a present—a peace-offering—a wiser Pollie took it, though there were more than three in her trousseau. She found out gradually that, though one has missed the best, good may yet remain; that if the Harry she had been in love with was lost to her, perhaps had never existed, there still lived beside her a Harry of whom she was really fond, and with whom her duty lay for all her days.

His good-natured *camaraderie,* which was offence when she still loved him—or thought she did—she accepted as her greatest blessing, and was thankful that he gave her a kind, careless affection, and exacted no more.

She learnt in time to be "soople in things immaterial"; and when she knew her anger was just, remembered, or tried to remember, that "in the course of justice none of us should see salvation."

Patience to endure was the besetting virtue of that age, as impatience to reform is the besetting virtue of this; and Pollie was the child of her time. Her pride—the pride which not only never whines under misfortune, but denies that there is any misfortune to whine about—also helped her not a little.

After all, too, the novels were not wholly wrong. How was it possible not to feel gently to Harry when Tommy looked up to her with Harry's eyes, and laid on hers a fat hand, stubby and strong and short—Harry's in miniature? But, if his face was his father's, in his nature he had his mother's deeper and livelier feelings, quicker temper, and honest heart.

It was her care, of course—and her happiness, too—to plan, to think, to look ahead for the son, while the father was breaking in for him the cleverest little pony in the world; to persuade Harry to see Mr. Rastrick on matters which would affect Tommy hereafter, instead of aiming Mr. Rastrick's communications, made into suitable pellets, at Tommy tumbling on the floor with Dim and Tim, his inseparable allies.

The problem—that hard problem—to make

Tommy respect a father who was eminently, but only, likeable; to obey him, but not to follow in his ways—she tackled with sense and spirit, and some measure of success. And so made her compromise with Fate.

At her side, of course, Tommy learnt C A T—cat, and D O G—dog, and, from that extraordinary Early-Victorian compendium, "Infantine Knowledge," responded to such dissimilar questions (in this strange rotation) as "Who made you?" "What is sago?" "Where is New York?"

Presently, Pollie went into the library, found Harry's old Latin grammar, and, with her curls rather flurried, and her cheeks rather flushed, learnt *mensa,* "a table," and *amo,* "I love," to be in time to help Tommy out of that pitfall concerning hostages and the gate of a city, into which she knew he must eventually be led. She used to hide the Latin grammar hastily under the sofa cushion when she heard Harry's footstep approaching; he was so certain to say that women had no business with Latin, and could not possibly understand it!

Only now, she took care to remind herself that, after all, he was by no means the only man of his day who believed that "if you once

suffer women to eat of the tree of knowledge, the rest of the family will soon be reduced to the same aërial and unsatisfactory diet."

It was also rather under the rose, and when Harry was out, that Pollie pursued her own reading, practising that innocent and comforting deceit, as formerly, sitting on the top of a step-ladder, with a sandalled foot dangling, and the curls shadowing an absorbed, bent face.

With wonder and delight she delved into that gold-mine of inexhaustible riches—the wisdom and genius of Shakespeare; and, sometimes, when that great master of the human heart touched with his sure hand some chord in her own experience, or opened the door of a new world of passion and feeling into which she might only look, she would lift her head, catch her breath in a sudden sigh, and feel as if her life were over.

But, indeed, she had only finished Chapter II.

CHAPTER III

PARSON GRANT

WHEN Harry Latimer's father was enjoying himself at Basset Manor, and Miss Pilkington's father was dispensing a pleasant and unjustifiable hospitality at the Rectory, the only son of a well-born country gentleman—living about thirty miles from Dilchester—went up to Cambridge University.

Peter Grant was at this time an immensely broad, tall, powerful and stupid young man, with a shock-head of reddish hair, a solid aversion to book-learning, and an equally solid and obstinate aptitude for what the slang of this day would call "ragging." It was not indeed that Peter was the pioneer of those frolics which took up all his time and energy at Alma Mater, but he was always in at the death. If the proctors caught anybody, they always caught him. His slow tongue was perfectly inapt at excuses; and while luckier undergraduates scraped into Chapel

by the skin of their teeth, as it were, honest Peter was invariably just too late.

He really drank less than his companions—though that distinction allowed him the privilege of drinking a good deal—but his red face and the lurid light shed on it by his red thatch of hair earned him the reputation of drinking much more. He was a great man on the river, and a terrifying boxer. His tutor warned him and expostulated with him in the first week of his first term. At the end of his fourth term, he was sent down to an enraged father, who announced an irrevocable intention of giving Peter a small farm, lying between Basset and Dilchester, and nothing else of any sort or description, and turning him, there and then, into a gentleman-farmer.

Peter did not object or agree to this proposal. But the next day he quietly walked out of the house with a few guineas in his pocket, took the stage from Dilchester to London; enlisted in the Rifle Brigade, which was shortly—in the spring of 1809—ordered to Portugal to join the army, then fighting the French in the Peninsula, under Sir Arthur Wellesley.

For three years he served his country as

so many did and do, honourably and without honours; and eventually became a non-commissioned officer. His herculean frame and constitution weathered the cruelties of General Craufurd's forced marches—the privations, the sickness, the blunders and the mismanagement which peculiarly distinguished that miserable and glorious campaign.

Finally, he joined the Forlorn Hope at the storming of Rodrigo, where the gallant Craufurd was killed; and again volunteered for the Forlorn Hope at the awful and bloody storming of Badajoz in April, 1812.

The Peter Grant of the Rifle Brigade in the Peninsular War was, of course, precisely the Peter Grant of Trinity College, Cambridge. He had no more the wits than he had opportunity for leadership, and not the wits to make the opportunity. But he had the dogged spirit of Highland ancestors, which turned him, on the defensive, into a solid, immovable rock, and caused him to be—now in a literal and dreadful sense—always in at the death. Now, as then, he led the life of his comrades; and a brave and brutal life it was. Only somehow Peter kept, what he kept for ever, a certain softness in his rough heart, and fidelity to a very brief creed:

respect a good woman, and never tell a lie—unless it is absolutely necessary.

It will be remembered that the besieging army lay outside Badajoz for a fortnight in ceaseless torrential rains; and at eight o'clock in the evening of April 6, 1812, began to storm the city.

Fortunately for history, some of the besiegers lived to forget the horrors of what one of them called "the most sanguinary and awful engagements on the records of any country," so far that they could hereafter speak and write of it. But of that storming in the darkness, when the besieged, not less furious and resolute than the besiegers, flung down the breaches, bags and barrels of gunpowder, live shells, hand grenades and fireballs; when "exploding mines cast up friends and foes together," and the booming of cannon and the shrieks, curses and agonies of the wounded, made hell, Peter Grant's lips, at least, could never be brought to tell.

He was one of the first inside the walls of Badajoz.

But here again were the regions of the damned—and a worse damnation. The city was at the mercy of a soldiery desperate from long privations, drunk with victory and wine,

who, in the confusion, fired on their own comrades, shot the women and children in the streets "for pastime," and committed outrages, murders, debaucheries—every vileness of which the human breast is capable, and which, except in broadest outline, no pen can describe.

It was Peter's fate to find himself, almost at once, in a great house where some drunken soldiers had crashed in the door and were looting and killing broadcast. In an upper room, Peter discovered the master of the house, an elderly Spaniard already wounded in the fray, and a woman, whom Peter supposed to be his daughter. Whether it was the look of her face—a young face which horror had frozen into an expression of anguish more appealing than any prayers or entreaties—or whether he simply acted on instinct, Peter could never tell; but, in a moment, he stood single-handed defending this man and woman, on the narrow stairway which led to the room where they had refuged, against his comrades. Peter, with his ugly mop of red hair, his redder face, and with a great gash in the cheek—Peter, six feet high and broad to match, lunging and plunging with his sword, was no doubt a sight gro-

tesque enough. But it was so fearsome a one that it saved the old Spaniard from certain death, and the girl from a fate far worse. For three days, with scarcely a moment's intermission, he held his post.

On April 10, when the 9th Regiment was marched into the town, plunder and debauchery ceased, and Badajoz began to be an orderly British garrison, Peter himself succumbed not only to a natural exhaustion, but to a violent rheumatism, brought on from the wet of the fortnight before the walls of the city. But he had friends, bound by no common ties. The Spaniard, something recovered of his wounds; the girl, whom Peter knew now to be his wife, desired nothing better than to nurse and help their benefactor.

Don Luis de la Mano, aged about fifty, was a courteous, honourable, generous and formal personage—an excellent type of the Spanish gentleman of his day.

Of his wife, Peter remembered, as he lay painful and feverish, a tall, slight figure, with a dark mantilla shading her dusky hair and the soft pallor of her face, who came noiselessly in and out of his sick-room; and presently, being *dévote* exceedingly, found among her ruined possessions a broken crucifix, which

she hung on the wall facing his bed. She knew a little English, and he as little Spanish. But, fortunately, neither wished to talk. Peter's eyes—the wistful eyes of some faithful old dog—followed her about the room. After the brutalities and miseries of the campaign—after the hell of the storming and sack—the mutilated *salon* where he lay seemed like heaven; and the ministering woman—perhaps any woman who had nursed him then would have seemed so—an angel. When he was better—but so crippled with rheumatism that his soldiering days were obviously ended and he was at once given his discharge—his hosts insisted on taking him to their country home, near Ronda.

By the time they reached it—it was an old Moorish palace greatly out of repair—the lavish Southern spring was well advanced. Peter had not thought—if he had thought about it at all—that natural beauty had a voice he could hear. But forty years after he could still smell the aromatic scents of Southern nights, and see the garden with the great cool shade of the eucalyptus tree, the rich tangle of flowers growing on the broken terraces, the dark *patio* with the lemon and orange trees in old green tubs, and the white,

hot wall of the house, where the lizards sunned themselves, and a great clump of bougainvilleas hung broken by its own weight.

Beneath the eucalyptus, Teresa presently brought an ancient Spanish-English conversation book, pens, paper, and an old Moorish inkstand, and essayed to teach her guest the Spanish language.

She was herself a very young, intense, devout, ecstatic woman, with a purity never assailed by passion—profoundly believing what a particularly dubious old *padre* had preached, and not the least disturbed by what he had practised. She had been married at sixteen, and she was faithfully attached to her husband, who treated her as a daughter. It never entered into her heart that Peter might care for her in a way in which she was herself, perhaps, constitutionally incapable of caring for any one. And, indeed, Peter never was in love with her; he only loved her—just as the shaggy old dog he strongly resembled might humbly and dumbly love his mistress. When Don Luis joined the lessons, Peter no more disliked his presence than the worshipper at a shrine resents the other worshippers.

He was, it must be confessed, a slow and clumsy pupil. His hands had been long used

to a more practical weapon than a pen; and he could never think quickly.

The spring merged into an intense, breathless summer, with that strange air of waiting and expectancy conveyed by great heat—with the sky above always a fervent blue, and the *patio,* or the deep shadows of the eucalyptus, the only places where one could live.

Suddenly, one burning day, Teresa was taken ill with one of those fearfully rapid inflammatory complaints, little understood now, and wholly misunderstood then. Peter, with his rheumatic limbs forced to an activity he did not even feel painful, and only his thatch of hair to protect his head from the fierce sun, rushed the four miles into Ronda for the doctor.

But before the next noon Teresa was dead, and Peter was sitting, dull and stricken, under the eucalyptus, trying, with the help of the little, old grammar, to write some necessary letters for the poor old Don.

Peter's Spanish—together with the disturbed state of the country—may have been the reason why no relative of any kind appeared for several days. It thus fell to Peter himself to make all the arrangements for her funeral—badly, but as best he could. Don

Luis found a comfort in his presence—he had realized his guest's reverence and adoration for Teresa—and Peter did not commit the mistake of speech, which, in the early stages of grief, so often makes a man a worse comforter than a dog. By the hour together, he and Don Luis sat together in the *patio,* smoking the eternal *cigarrito* of the Spaniard, and saying nothing at all. At last, there arrived voluble, tearful relations; and Peter knew that his mission and a chapter of his life were finished.

He said good-bye to his kind and broken host, taking with him, for the purpose of a correspondence, the grammar, and the exercises which Teresa had corrected. He found a home-bound ship at Malaga, and returned to England. For a while, and at long intervals, he wrote to Don Luis, but the shortage of Peter's epistolary ideas, as well as of his Spanish, soon caused the correspondence to wane; and at last it died altogether.

The first news that met Peter on his arrival was the death of his father.

Peter's name had not been mentioned in the despatches; and there was no reason why he should be forgiven. Old Mr. Grant left practically all his money—there was less than

had been expected—to his daughter; and once again his son found himself beginning the world. He chanced to meet one day Sir John Railton, then quite a boy, and a distant cousin of Peter's. Sir John, having extracted some part of Peter's story, clapped him cheerfully on the back, and suggested he should become a parson; adding that old Pil of Basset was *dead* certain to drop off soon, and that then Peter should have the living of Basset—be hanged if he shouldn't! Perhaps Peter was dimly aware he was not wholly cut out for a parson; but there were a good many as little suited to their cloth; and his fortunes were at a low ebb.

Somehow, he scraped through his Ordination examinations—the Bishop must surely have been a cousin too—was ordained to a very poor curacy near Dilchester, where his usual bad luck followed him. "Old Pil" perversely lived to be ninety; and it was not until the reign of William IV. was nearly ended, and Peter himself was about fifty years old, that he at last received his reward, and became, as the youthful patron had promised, Rector of Basset.

It is almost impossible to imagine a greater contrast than that formed by the

placid jog-trot life of the country clergy of that day and the fierce excitement of Peter's military youth—unless it were the contrast between little, dull, English Basset, with its few cottages with smoke-wreathed chimneys, the green green and stagnant pond, the still, grey landscape and the white ribbon of the turnpike road winding through it, and the riot of rich colour, the luxuriant tropical growths, the warmth, passion and glow of Southern Spain.

Peter's long curacy had indeed given him plenty of time to become acclimatized; only he had known the curacy to be a stepping-stone, a means to an end, while Basset was the last word, and for life.

The Rectory was a large house; not so forlorn and shabby when Peter took possession of it as it afterwards became. He had the benefit of the Pilkington flock wall-papers—outlined here and there with the shape of Pilkington sideboards and wardrobes, removed. He bought at the Pilkington sale a horse-hair suite for his dining-room; and took over the Pilkington oilcloth, wearing into holes, in the hall, and a disconsolate umbrella-stand. He further bought an ancient leather chair for the study—so-called; and the auctioneer who was disposing of the Pilkington

effects delicately suggested that some of the ponderous tomes from which the late rector had drawn material for his sermons would at least *look* well in Peter's study; and then, seeing the ineffectiveness of that argument on Peter's honest mind, observed how badly off the elderly Miss Pilkingtons were left—and Peter purchased at once.

The drawing-room he decided to use as a lumber-room. The auctioneer persuaded him into a vast four-post bed, adding, as an inducement, that three Pilkingtons had already died in it, and that its excellent durability made it more than probable that Peter might die in it too.

His sister, Maria, sent him as much household linen as she thought he was fit to be entrusted with. Peter found an elderly couple in the village to manage for him—or, more correctly, the elderly couple found Peter to manage—and he began to be Rector of Basset.

It is a great mistake, and a common mistake, to think that because the modern parson has a standard of duty at once broader and higher than any these old parsons set up for themselves, therefore the old parsons were not, as a general rule, conscientious persons. If

they shot, hunted, and dined freely enough, it was because there appeared to them no reason why the man of God should not be something of a man of the world as well. Old Pilkington certainly had acted up to his lights, and conducted his services, as he believed, decently and in order. Peter's code of duty was shorter and rougher, but such commands as he heard he obeyed doggedly and faithfully; and if he considered that he had a right to be on leave all the week and in marching orders on Sunday only, three parts of the Established Church of his day shared that opinion with him.

About nine, then, on most week-days, he partook of a leisurely, untidy breakfast, and smoked three or four cigarettes thoughtfully after it.

That smoking was the worst accusation Basset ever brought against him. Then, indeed, smoking was still considered a low or a fast habit; even Harry Latimer, in his free and easy bachelor days, never smoked anywhere but in the stables or in a remote upper room; and after Pollie's advent, she used to purify a place in which some one had had a pipe much more vigorously than she would have thought of doing if some one had

had scarlet-fever. Most of his congregation would have considered it preferable that Peter should smell of drink than of smoke. Miss Pilkington, whose adored, excellent papa had had three parts of a bottle of port regularly every night, thought Peter's pet vice so horrible that she could never bear to allude to it.

Peter, who was little affected by people's opinions, even when he divined them, which was not often, never smoked the cigarettes out of doors, or, as it were, before the parish; but within he found Don Luis' habit of infinite comfort and calm.

After the morning cigarettes, it was his habit to step softly, in carpet slippers, down the long-flagged passage to the kitchen and meekly ask Mrs. Ainger for his boots, with an undoubted apology in his gruff tones for having taken the liberty to be born with feet. Peter, indeed, was the kind of man who would eat saltless eggs for ever rather than ring the bell; and, such is the pusillanimity of six feet in its socks before four feet three in the person of a determined little black-eyed woman, that he had actually on one occasion deceitfully put a bleeding chop into the fire rather than confess to Mrs. Ainger, by leaving it on his plate, that it had been uneatable.

Of Ainger *mari* he was considerably less afraid; indeed, it was only before the weak and defenceless that Peter himself became timid and unresisting.

All day long, sometimes, he and Ainger gardened, Ainger doing a good deal of leaning on his spade and contemplating the landscape and the political situation, but Peter working with the solid thoroughness with which he had ragged at the University or shot down Frenchmen at Badajoz. To paint one's own gates and tar one's own fences was not esteemed by an age greatly more conventional than our own to be a gentlemanly proceeding, any more than to turn one's self into a hob-nail Hodge and dig and plant the garden was the work of a gentleman; but, somehow, no one ever mistook old Peter for anything else.

If his want of means fortunately supplied him with a good deal of work, it somewhat limited his play.

He kept no carriage; not even what Sydney Smith called "one of those Shem, Ham, and Japhet buggies, made on Mount Ararat soon after the subsidence of the waters," which were to be found in many a rectory stable. He could not hunt unless some one mounted

him. Good-natured Harry Latimer, indeed, did that not seldom; and Peter was such a first-rate shot with his antiquated flint-lock that he got many a day in the coverts with the local squires. They thought him a stupid fellow enough when he dined with them and their lady wives and daughters of an afternoon, and so he was. When the men tried to draw him out on the subject of his military experiences over the wine after dinner, no glib meanderings from the point would roll off his difficult tongue. He filled up his glass in an obstinate, heavy silence; and kept it. Occasionally Dr. Benet dined with him—a very bad dinner—at the Rectory. Old Benet, perhaps, guessed, very vaguely, at something in Peter's heart or history, not for prying eyes.

At the Manor, the Parson dined often, and loved to dine. Practical Pollie always remembered the dishes he liked; and when she sang "I'd be a Butterfly" in the drawing-room, he used to take up a most awkward position on a chair just behind her, where he sat well forwards, with his large red hands on his knees, and his eyes looking straight into space.

Presently, she learnt a couple of those Irish

Melodies of Moore's which tug at the heart-strings, and at which the women of that time would weep and faint with a long extinct sensibility. Sentiment only made old Peter grimmer and gruffer than ever. But he never forgot to ask for the Melodies regularly every time he came; and when Pollie had sung them and administered to him four large cups of tea, and Dim and Tim rubbed themselves in canine friendliness against his legs, he would tramp home, not ill-content.

Of course, now and then, there were secular duties connected with the parish, and a parishioner came to consult him about selling a pig or making a will; while sometimes, naturally, persons elected to die, to be baptized, or to be buried, on week-days. Though Peter seldom visited any one, unless asked, when asked, he would walk his ten miles—his parish was very straggling—at any time, and through any weather; and though, when he had read to the sick person a chapter of the Bible (seldom well selected), he had no spiritual consolations to offer and sat by the bed dull and dumb enough, yet, somehow, there was an atmosphere of sympathy about him not misunderstood, and many an old crone

died the easier for the grasp of the Parson's hand.

His Sundays were really laborious.

In the very early days of his curacy, wretched Peter had once sat for five whole hours gazing despairingly at a virgin sheet of manuscript, mending dozens of quill pens, and giving himself a severe headache, without even reaching the text of his first sermon. Then he strode into Dilchester, spent a sum he could very ill afford on two hundred Original Discourses—of great variety of subject, said the advertisement, and might have added, of doctrine as well. The absurd prejudice, still extant, of not reading printed and published sermons by well-known writers was much more violent then—as were all prejudices—than it is now. So Peter, both at his curacy and at Basset, kept those two hundred Original Discourses in his boot-cupboard in a pile, and twice on Sundays preached the top ones, which, used, he duly placed at the bottom till their turn came round again.

Armed, then, with one of these Discourses, —rather dirty through having come in contact with the boots—he walked to church every Sunday morning. He did not feel it to

be part of his duty to compel the louts on the green to come in; so they bade him good-morning sheepishly and with perfect good-nature, and stayed outside.

Mr. Pilkington had been a luxurious person who had had the church warmed in winter by a stove. Hardier Peter simply put on his great-coat beneath his surplice, causing himself to look like a very long, stout, animated bolster, with a pair of workaday legs appearing beneath it. The Manor pew had a fire-place, in which Pollie had a fire lit by one of the Manor servants an hour before church-time, and sensible Mrs. Benet brought one extra shawl for her own shoulders, and another for her good man's legs.

In Peter's code of duty it was written large that the seldomness of his services should be compensated by their length. So all that can be put into Order for Morning Prayer, he put there; the clerk was immensely leisurely and droning; "the music"—always so-called—consisting of a small band of about four instruments, and occupying the little western gallery, played very loud and slow; while the bought sermon was, of course—since it is much easier to be lengthy than brief, and apparently impossible when one has

nothing to say to help saying it at immense length—never less than three-quarters of an hour in duration.

One morning, Peter, in the great pulpit, would find himself enunciating a smug Evangelicalism, and in the afternoon he was mildly —to be sure, very mildly—Latitudinarian; and once he surprised himself stumbling through a diatribe against the iniquities of Rome. He never did it again. The next day he marshalled his Two Hundred in front of him, and disgraced from the ranks any containing allusions to the Scarlet Lady or the Damnable Doctrine of Indulgences. Peter had seen Roman Catholicism at first hand—not always a much better kind than that the Discourses pointed in such lurid colours; but, then, he had known one to whom Catholicism was an inspiration of a divine purity, a most fervent, assured faith, and Parson Grant was doggedly determined to leave it to the other parsons to decry.

As for his congregation becoming drowsy during his sermons, *that* Peter took as quite natural, and was neither amused nor discomfited when an old gaffer on the front free seat put up his legs on it the moment the text

was given out, that he might sleep the more at his ease.

Mr. Pilkington had kept the church well swept, mended, and garnished. But when the cloth covering on the Table fell into rags, that neglect did not seem to Peter to be of the least consequence; and when the clerk suggested the drawer in that Table to be a handy place in which to keep the tallow dips and the matches wherewith the pulpit was lit at afternoon service, Peter readily agreed.

Old Pilkington, again, had pleasantly but firmly reprimanded " the music " after service, when, during service, it had become particularly discordant and noisy; but in Peter's day the 'cello—played by the village cobbler—was allowed to drown all the other instruments until, in despair, they themselves quarrelled with it at the alehouse one evening, and reduced it, by the logic of the fist, to comparative silence.

Nor did it seem wrong to Peter, when he acquired a large, underbred dog like a brown rug, to allow Rover to rove up the aisle to the vestry with him. When Rover found the service too long, which, with his excellent canine judgment, he always did, and scrabbled feelingly at the vestry door, Peter simply

left his reading-desk and the prayers, and went to that door to address to Rover a few calming words, perfectly audible throughout the church.

Yet it was not that old Peter was irreverent; but that he had lived, rough and hard, amid events whose magnitude made trifles, trifles indeed, and if he had been able to formulate his thoughts, might have argued that what seemed small to him must be smaller indeed to Omnipotence, ruling the stupendous events of all the world.

Besides, Peter was of his age. When once his old enemy, rheumatism, imprisoned him to the house, and he had a *locum* in the shape of what Crabb Robinson would have called "a genteel youth with a Puseyite tendency," that divine was not half so shocked by the sins of omission and commission he found perpetrated in Basset Church as genteel youths with a Puseyite tendency would be now. It is pleasant to add that Peter quite appreciated in this *aide-de-camp* his greater diligence and strictness of life, and that the genteel youth found himself, at the end of a very brief visit, feeling almost affectionately towards lax, untidy Parson Grant.

After Mr. and Mrs. Ainger had managed

the Rectory for some years, Ainger died. Peter found a new gardener, and Mrs. Ainger continued to conduct the house.

One night, about a year after these events, Peter sat up exceedingly late, smoking cigarette after cigarette, and composing a letter with even more throes and difficulty than usually accompanied his literary productions. He himself posted the letter the next morning.

Three days later, at four o'clock on a winter afternoon, as he sat in his study, reprehensibly smoking as usual, the door opened (the hall doors of Basset were always on the latch), and Maria, Peter's sister, from whom he had been contentedly parted for many years, suddenly broke in upon him. She was about fifty-five, stout and agitated, the stoutness being apparently increased by her voluminous shawl, bonnet and muff; while her agitation was such that she omitted all greeting, and simply gasped—

"Peter, how *could* you?" and then in the same breath, "You have been smoking!"

Following a natural instinct, Peter avowed the lesser of two sins, and made some indistinct apologies for the cigarettes. But he knew very well that Maria had a point from which she was not likely to be turned.

The truth was, that that old fool Peter had proposed marriage to Mrs. Ainger, or had been made by her to think that he had proposed it. Middle-aged and entirely unbeautiful, that little, determined woman had positively persuaded Parson Grant that she had injured a hitherto immaculate reputation by living in the house with him after her husband's death, and that marriage was but a just reparation.

Wretched Peter had weakly yielded to these representations; but some life-preserving instinct had made him immediately write off his intentions to the bold and decided Maria. She argued with him—" a good talking to," was her own expression—for upwards of an hour, discovered there had been no letters, and nothing practically in the shape of a promise, and at last made Peter—Peter was so unutterably stupid!—see that he was the victim of an artful design.

Then, leaving him in his study, she hastened to the back regions, had a heated conversation with Mrs. Ainger, dismissed and packed her off then and there, compensating her for the inconvenience of a hurried departure with a sufficient sum of money (Peter's). Breathing asthmatically, Maria proceeded to the

wintry garden, and gave notice to the gardener, and before nightfall had discovered a new, promising couple to take charge of the Rectory—the husband being so much younger than the wife that he could by no possibility die first.

That night Maria passed under her brother's roof—tired, triumphant, and a little short in temper. The next day Peter put her and her carpet-bag into the dilapidated gig, which was the only vehicle to be hired in Basset, and she returned to Dilchester, and, thence by coach, to the bosom of a recklessly large Early-Victorian family, having accomplished, perhaps, the prime good deed of her life.

Old Peter went back with heavy steps to the study, drew out the cigarettes again, and passed a long, idle, thoughtful evening, smoking, while distant sounds from the back regions of the new brooms sweeping clean reached him, not disturbingly.

It was five and twenty years since he had left Spain and Teresa; and there were moments—only moments—when he could see them as clearly as if the five and twenty years were yesterday. The "idiocy"—that was Maria's name for it—which he had nearly perpetrated did not soil, because it never

touched at all, that episode of his early life. He could no more have aspired to Teresa than the ragamuffin in the crowd can aspire to the princess. He believed that, had she lived and been free, he could never have asked more than to touch the hem of her garment, and go away. It is true that in these dull, practical years he was not always thinking of her. It is only in books that people remember without ceasing; in life there is always something to be done next,

> "And we forget because we must,
> And not because we will."

Memento of her, save the many corrections in her little handwriting in the Spanish exercise books which he kept in a drawer upstairs, he had none. At first, he had been used to look at them often and with an intolerable pang; after a while, it sufficed him to know they were there; and at last—so strangely are we made—he would recall the garden at Ronda, and Teresa in her slim youth and with her delicate, spiritual face, without sorrow. Pollie Latimer would have said he was happy—he had kept his illusions. And, indeed, though he knew humbly that as a wife Teresa would have been infinitely

above him, it never once occurred to him that when an ordinary man marries a saint, it may not be only the saint who suffers.

To-night, his mind went slipping back to old times more than usual.

"You had better have married a Spaniard!" Maria had said, as though a Spaniard were a Hottentot. As a rule, in the solitary evenings, Peter, having been out all day in the fresh air, and the grog at his side being strong, went to sleep. But to-night, he forgot to drink the grog, and the cigarette ash burnt a hole in the sleeve of his forlorn old coat; and it was so late when he went to bed that he crept upstairs in his large, stockinged feet, absurdly afraid of waking and shocking his brand-new household.

A few years after the Mrs. Ainger episode, of which Basset never even heard—unluckily, its excitements being very few—Parson Grant made a new friend. That is to say, Tommy Latimer of the Manor, then aged about four, took him into his charge and favour, and visited him whenever he was allowed to, and sometimes when he was not. The truth is, Tommy, who was a youth of great enterprise, found that all the things he was forbidden to do in the Manor garden

were permitted to him at the Rectory—that there he could survey life from the top of the dust-heap or the chicken-house with impunity. As Tommy was always talking himself, he did not notice Peter's conversational deficiencies. The Parson, indeed, sat in his study and listened quite patiently and interestedly while Tommy counted up to two hundred, a recently acquired accomplishment under which the Manor had already turned restive.

Occasionally, as a great treat, Tommy had the delicious enjoyment—*he* thought it a delicious enjoyment, if no one else did—of dining *tête-à-tête* of an afternoon with his spiritual director, and, after dinner, had a little decanter and wineglass to himself and what he called tawny-port—it was, indeed, very tawny—to drink; and then, when dessert was over, the Parson would show him how to use a toy sword—Tommy making a number of *naïf,* eager inquiries, without waiting for the answers, as to *real* battles.

It is impossible to say how large a place the friendship for the child took in the Parson's dull and limited life at last. Basset used often to see them, walking hand in hand through the village, on terms of the greatest confidence. Peter would call on Mrs. Lati-

mer solely in the hope—never disappointed—of hearing her talk about Tommy. He walked his rheumatic legs into Dilchester to buy the child toys out of his ill-filled purse; and when Tommy artfully admired anything at the Rectory, that weak old Peter always gave it to him.

But sometimes, as he blundered through one of the bought sermons on a Sunday afternoon, for just a second the great grey church and the bats in the roof, " the music " fidgetting in the gallery, the Early-Victorian women in the garish hues they affected, and even flaxen-headed Tommy at his mother's side, were as though they were not; and Peter saw again Teresa in her black robes in the Southern garden—with its rich tangle of flowers growing on the broken terraces, the dark *patio,* and the white, hot wall where the lizards sunned themselves and the great clump of bougainvilleas hung broken by its own weight.

CHAPTER IV

DR. RICHARD

EVER since Basset had been doctored by anybody, it had been doctored by Benets.

In the Georgian period, Benet *père* had set up in Basset his little apothecary's shop, with his name, and a pestle and mortar on a board, over its door; had made pills, potions and plaisters for the neighbourhood, sold it scented soaps, and the powder many persons still wore in their hair; had ridden on his old nag to most of the houses of the local gentry, where he sometimes took a glass of wine in the housekeeper's room; and was considered to have done well for himself when he married a housekeeper's niece.

He gave his son a very fairly good medical education, and was able to leave him not only his practice, but an exceedingly modest independent fortune as well. Young Dr. Richard removed from above the door the board with the pestle and mortar on it, while he continued to ply those instruments and to live

in the house of his father. What had been the shop, with two pink bottles in it, became the best parlour, and a very small surgery was built next to it. Basset began to talk of calling in the doctor, instead of using the 'pothecary. Presently Dr. Richard married the only daughter of a small solicitor in Dilchester; Mrs. Latimer, the elder, really because she was bored and idle, and society in Basset was woefully restricted, and not with any idea of creating precedent, called on the bride; the Pilkingtons and other local gentry followed suit, and came to the conclusion that if a man be worthy to kill you or cure you, he may be suffered to dine with you as well.

In time, there were no better liked people by all classes in the village than "young Dr. Benet" (as Basset persisted in calling him, in contradistinction to his father, long after his scanty hair was grey and his figure portly) and Jane, his wife.

When Harry Latimer had indulged in matrimony some few years, and Parson Grant had narrowly avoided it, the Doctor was about sixty-eight years old, short in the neck and leg, with a wheezy, asthmatical tendency, rather a red face, the scanty grey hair (he wore no wig) having a surprised,

rumpled appearance, black worsted stockings, a great big silver watch, and, under untidy, shaggy grey eyebrows, a pair of uncommonly penetrating and kindly eyes.

Mrs. Benet was also short to match him, a capable person, with a broad, plain, clever face, skirts sensibly short, shoes sensibly flat, wearing on the top of her own hair a brown madonna front, which she hung, with simple straightforwardness, with her cap on the capstan by the looking-glass every night when she went to bed, and replaced on her head, with the same candid honesty, every morning when she got up. Only her husband's affection could possibly at any time have made him find her attractive; but, after all, it is much better to be thought beautiful because one is loved, than to be loved because one is thought beautiful.

There was no happier home in Basset than the Doctor's shabby and well-scrubbed little house. The living-room, though it was furnished with a horsehair suite, a brown wallpaper, and a dismal print of the trial of Queen Caroline, was all the same a pleasant, lovable place when the old curtains were drawn about the windows on a wintry night, a bright fire ablaze, and the tea and muffins

on the table. The Benets' Maggie, a short-sleeved, short-frocked creature from the dame-school, sang louder and more cheerily over her kitchen dish-washings than anybody else's Maggie in the neighbourhood. The parlour, once the shop, was, to be sure, a cold, stuffy room, with a sofa like a sarcophagus, the ornament which had figured on the top of the Benets' wedding cake nearly forty years earlier under a glass shade on the table, while two imitation parrots (in wools, with boot buttons for eyes), which had been made and presented to the Benets by a niece —not out of malice prepense, but with really kind and pleasant intentions—surveyed the scene from the white marble mantelpiece. Still, as the parlour was never used except on the rare occasion of a tea-party, its beauties gave its owners satisfaction without inconvenience.

Punctually at six o'clock every morning, Mrs. Benet rose softly from beside her sleeping lord, and in a serviceable dressing-gown, and with an infinitesimal plait of grey hair hanging below her night-cap, lit a tallow dip, and went to rouse Maggie. Then, having performed her own toilet very quietly, Madam, leaving the Doctor still slumbering,

descended to the kitchen to cook his breakfast, while the youthful Maggie swept and dusted with great vigour, humming a hymn beneath her breath.

Directly after breakfast, the Doctor went to his little surgery, and there doctored the humbler patients who came to see him.

There were not many of them as a rule—which was just as well for Dr. Richard. Most of them could certainly have afforded much better to pay him something, than he could afford not to be paid at all; but he was of an age which made quite sure that to be charitable is inevitably to do good; and asked no fees from the poor on principle. To be sure, despite that weakness, they were a little in awe as well as fond of him. For the Doctor, in that age of medical darkness, had what is more useful even to his profession than a knowledge of medicine—a great knowledge of character; and was famous for his diagnosis of the maladies of the soul as well as of the body. He not only perceived, which was easy, from the look of Hodge's face and the trembling of his hands, the direction of Hodge's wages; but saw, though indeed only in a glass darkly, what few people saw at all in that day, the effect of mind on

body; so that the little dressmaker, a meek, frightened thing, who had rashly set up for herself in Basset—the Basset ladies having hitherto had all their garments made in Dilchester—required, not physic and plaisters, as she believed, but a start, and an order from little Mrs. Latimer at the Manor. The very next afternoon, Dr. Richard wheezed up the Manor drive to see Pollie; obtained her word, which was as good as a bond, to assist Miss Fitten; and cured his patient.

Yet Dr. Benet was certainly not so superior to his age as to disbelieve in drugs. His visitors at the surgery would have been bitterly disappointed if he had not sent them away laden with pill-boxes and medicine-bottles, and would certainly not have believed that they could be really better, unless they had first been made to feel very much worse.

At half-past nine, the Doctor locked up the surgery door, and went into the kitchen to tell his wife of some invalid who would be the better for some milk, and of another who would like one of her puddings. Mrs. Benet herself buttoned her husband's round, short figure into his driving-coat, and put his great neckcloth the proper number of times round his neck—or as many times as the neck

permitted—gave him a sound smack on the shoulder instead of a kiss, and came down the flagged path to see him start off in the gig, sometimes with George, the groom, but more often without him. The horse—fifteen years earlier he had been named, not so very inaptly, Neck-or-Nothing—had to be roused from the doze into which he always fell, from long habit, directly he pulled up at any human habitation; the Doctor drew the old driving-apron over his knees, shook his whip as good-bye at his wife, and Neck-or-Nothing (who was fat as well as lazy) ambled tranquilly through little Basset into the country lanes beyond.

Dr. Benet had a very scattered practice, and if people had sent for the doctor in those days half as often as they do now, would have been busy indeed.

For the ten years between 1830 and 1840 were among the most unhealthy in modern history. The poor—not only the poor of the great towns, but of little villages like Basset—lived in a condition of filth and overcrowding, with which there was no sanitary inspector to interfere. An excellent authority declared that, even among the wealthy classes, "the broad principles of drainage were less

understood than they had been in Nineveh, and were certainly not as good as they were in Rome under Augustus." Provisions were very dear, and trade very bad. The waves of typhus, cholera, and small-pox which broke over the country, were accepted with a most fatal fatalism. The health of the people was not improved by the little beer-shops which, in addition to the public-houses proper, were opened everywhere, after the repeal of the beer duty in 1830.

But old Dr. Benet, with many of his brethren, was prevented from being overworked or rich, not only by the fact that people doctored their small ailments themselves, but by the rarity of the nervous diseases which have since become so lucrative a part of medical practice; and by that very fatalism which made people not only accept their sickness as from Heaven, but trust their cure to it as well.

It was, perhaps, at some desolate cottage that Neck-or-Nothing pulled up first; and the old Doctor climbed down, stoutly and with difficulty, with a great physic bottle sticking out of his pocket, knotted the reins on the gatepost, and went within. Be sure his perspicacity seldom deceived him as to

whether the starved look on his peaky child-patient's face was there because the parents would not, or because they could not, feed it properly. Plausible explanations were lost on the Doctor somehow. Those eyes under the shaggy eyebrows might be old eyes, but they were alert enough. Sometimes, out of the pocket with the physic came some rough toy, which Mrs. Benet, who had a maternal heart under her brisk, manly aspect, had sent the child. When Mrs. Hodge came to the gate to see him drive away, the Doctor would ask why, if there was always enough money for the beer-house, there should not be enough for milk; adding that he would call in again in a week, and should easily see by the look of his patient where the money had gone.

More often, a grateful sufferer paid his fee in the form of a basket of crab-apples, or half a sack of potatoes; Neck-or-Nothing would turn his lazy head, and look reproachfully at his master, as these make-weights were being thumped into the gig.

Now and again, in a green spring lane, the Doctor would stop, dig up some ferns and primroses, and add further to the burdens in the carriage. Except in rare cases, he was nearly as leisurely as his horse, and did not

as a rule suppose his advice would turn the scales of life and death. If Nature had not been, so to speak, wholly out of court in that day, old Benet would have trusted to her; as it was, though he believed, more or less, with the rest of his profession, in his own interference with her operations, he was wise enough to believe rather less than more.

At the great house, at which he arrived presently, he descended from the gig at the hall door—a dreadful Roman portico—as clumsily and unconcernedly as if the eye of the spacious and magnificent footman were but the humble and uncritical orb of Mrs. Hodge. Nor did the languid fine airs of the local magnate's lady in the drawing-room—who was anxious to impress upon him that, for her, the apothecary, the attorney, the merchant, were an entirely different and lower class from the landed gentry—affect him at all. He was simply busy about his duties; and, for him, her airs were merely part of the day's work. She found out too, in time, that instead of the stout, wheezy, grey-headed little apothecary being afraid of her, she had become herself a little afraid of him, as being imperturbably candid, and

having a disconcerting knack of hitting the right nail on the head.

It was difficult for the Doctor, when she took him presently to her invalid husband's room, to convey without offence to Sir Thomas Mainwaring that he ate too much and drank too much; but somehow old Benet did it. It was not that he had a good bedside manner. The cultivated, pompous cheerfulness, the fresh, jovial air of heartiness and prosperity which is supposed to enliven the sick, Dr. Richard had not. It is true he liked his joke, and when he laughed his long, shaking asthmatic chuckle, which threatened to break the chair under him and even to end his life suddenly in an apoplexy, the patient must needs laugh too. Dr. Benet's bedside manner was, in fact, his own natural manner —and perhaps, after all, that is in all circumstances, private or professional, the best manner there is.

He left Sir Thomas and my Lady with the conviction that he had spoken the truth; and that, if that truth-speaking cost him their patronage, he would amble back to Basset in his disgraceful old gig to his shabby house, *bourgeoise* wife, and second-rate friends, quite philosophically.

The Baronet and his Lady were sensible enough to see the advantage of such a medical adviser over the politer Dr. Clarke from Dilchester, who kow-towed to them, and called their complaints by much pleasanter names; and when Sir Thomas over-ate and drank himself again, it was old Dr. Richard who was requested to step in and tell him so.

Very many of his cases were, of course, far more sad and difficult.

There were times when he came from some house of mourning, pondering over the spectacle of men grieving because they could not grieve; or on the problem that innocence should suffer so damnably for guilt, while guilt sometimes—but not often, because they who sow to the flesh are wont to reap corruption even in this world—goes healthy and free.

The reins lay so loosely on Neck-or-Nothing's back, that that prudent animal would sometimes stop altogether and take a nap, while his master meditated. In a hovel, perhaps, the Doctor had left some miserable creature, diseased and poor, with nothing to live for, and yet clinging to life; and in some wealthy and substantial house, Youth with his world at his feet, but not loth to leave it.

Who should solve these riddles? Was there any solution of the Great Riddle, after all?

The Doctor remembered his whereabouts with a start, gave the reins a jerk, and trotted tranquilly home, beneath fleecy skies, between the meadows where the lambs were already bleating, and saw from the fall and decay of autumn,

> "New blossoms flourish, and new flowers arise
> As God had been abroad, and walking there
> Had left His footsteps, and reformed the year."

At home—he reached it at most irregular hours, though seldom until late afternoon, on account of the long distances between the houses of his patients—his wife was always about, awaiting him. The pickles she pickled, the sound ale she brewed, the blackings and furniture polishes she invented, the cleanings she personally prosecuted or supervised, in his absence, would have been impossible to a less indefatigable person. In their small back garden she kept chickens, and attended to them herself; keeping a sharp eye meantime on George, planting spinach.

Jane Benet had not wasted much of her day over that abominable institution, the

morning call. Mrs. Latimer was always busy herself; and with Miss Pilkington, who was not, old Jeannie evinced a somewhat short patience when Rachel sat in the Doctor's prim, damp parlour prattling politely, and sipping cowslip wine.

It was generally said, indeed, that Jane Benet had a temper, and since there is no having a character without one, no doubt she had. But that temper, like her housewifely qualities, was used for her "old man," as she called him, and not against him. If she scolded George and Maggie, it was in her determination to have everything spick and span for the Doctor when he came back; and she did not mind in the least how much mud *his* Wellingtons brought into her minute, spotless passage called a hall. She unwound that many-wreathed neckcloth from his short neck, and made wifely inquiries as to whether he had eaten the sandwich she had put into his pocket in the morning. If he looked tired or worried, she was not the fool to ask him why or wherefore; instead, she arranged for dinner to be half an hour earlier, and, weather permitting, put his old armchair and slippers cosily near the fire of the homely living-room.

Their dinner was generally about four—a

fearsome hour, if it involves making small-talk to guests for the remainder of the evening, but not such a bad hour if that evening is to be *à deux,* and those two find in each other's society an entire satisfaction.

When Maggie had cleared the table, Jane Benet snuffed the tallow candles, and stitched at one of the Doctor's shirts, while Richard made up his books. Then, work and business were put away, the candles were snuffed again, Maggie brought in the tea-tray, Jeannie brewed her good-man and herself an excellent, strong cup apiece, and, placing their substantial feet on the fender and drawing up to the fire, they each produced a novel. Dr. Richard nearly chuckled himself into a fit over "Pickwick," which had just appeared as a whole, and which he had borrowed from the Dilchester book-club; while large tears rolled down Mrs. Benet's capacious cheeks over the yards of sentiment and pathos in the last fashionable romance by a Lady of Title. It would be hard to say whether Doctor or Mrs. Doctor had the greater enjoyment.

About ten, Jane felt in a petticoat pocket for a voluminous handkerchief, and mopped up her tears in a final, business-like manner;

and the Doctor, still chuckling, replaced "Pickwick" on a shelf. If it was cold weather, Mrs. Benet concocted a modest night-cap of mulled port. Over it, the pair talked a little, or understood each other without talking.

That they were childless, having greatly wished for children, had drawn them the closer. The few relatives either had left in the world were so far away that, even if the Doctor could have spared the time, he could not have afforded the money to visit them. So they had only each other—and Basset.

In the village there was not a single soul who was not Dr. Richard's patient; and all his patients were, in greater or less degree, his friends. His life had begun among them, and would end there; his wife's life was merged in his completely, and she was, in the strictest sense, the helpmeet for him.

Sometimes, as the pleasant fire—economically made up by Mrs. Benet to last the right time but no longer—flickered to its close, the Doctor would lean forward to her chair and affectionately pat one of those stout, work-worn hands, which had done so much for him. There were no heads in Basset which rested easier on their pillows than those

two old heads in the night-caps, in the great four-poster with the faded red curtains, in the Doctor's house.

Their just slumbers were comparatively seldom disturbed by the ringing of the night bell. When they were, Mrs. Benet, not a little annoyed at the want of consideration of persons who elected to die or be born at hours so inconvenient, herself rose and, if need were, roused George to get ready the gig, and protected her husband with wraps against that night air, which the profession and the laity of the day alike held to be so fruitful a source of disease. In the Doctor's absence, Jane, since she could do no good, snoozed sensibly; but she was always awake with that universal panacea for all trials and inconveniences, a hot cup of tea, when he came back.

Did he say anything to her of his professional experiences? Who knows? She was certainly either the wise woman who could hold her tongue; or the wiser and rarer woman who did not even try to loosen his.

Quiet as Basset certainly was, people so well known as Dr. Richard and his wife could not be suffered to spend all their leisure at their own fireside.

Sometimes they passed a blameless evening—tea, muffins, and sixpenny whist—at Miss Pilkington's. It must be confessed that this entertainment sadly bored the Doctor; Jane, woman-like, was not ill-pleased to hear a little gossip, and put on her silk dress—every woman then, whether she siller had to spare or not, walked in silk attire on festal occasions. Jane Benet's brown silk was of immemorial antiquity; and in mid-career had received a sad check in the shape of a tureen of melted butter being spilt down its front breadth, at a dinner-party in Dilchester, by a coachman masquerading for the evening as a butler. Mrs. Benet, having tried ineffectually to match the silk, and with all known household remedies to remove the stain, at last philosophically resolved always to keep her large arm—finished at the wrist with a white one-buttoned glove, and ornamented with a bracelet made out of an aunt's hair—in a position to hide the damaged part.

The Doctor, who had said "Very handsome, Jeannie, very handsome," when he first saw the dress, continued to say so and think so every time it appeared. Therefore, with its skirt well turned up over a most respect-

able petticoat, her evening cap in a box in her hand, and the Doctor by her side, carrying a lanthorn and her large pair of satin slippers, Jane walked out to dine in it with the Latimers, without a qualm. And what was good enough for the Doctor and the Squire, must surely be good enough for anybody.

One autumn morning, Mrs. Benet, having occasion to buy some honey at a distant cottage, was surprised to perceive on her homeward way the only house in Basset which was let in lodgings, undergoing a very unusual cleaning and repairing.

Mrs. Whittaker, the landlady, was a person so perfectly pleasant and slatternly that Mrs. Benet always felt strongly inclined to tell her what she thought of her. Her husband, however, had warned her, when she was taken with such an inclination with regard to any of his patients, to come away at once; so she returned to him with no further information than that Mrs. Whittaker had evidently let her rooms to somebody. Once, they had been briefly inhabited by Phillips, Harry Latimer's agent, before he found a house; and Peter Grant had stayed there, waiting for the surviving Pilkingtons to

abandon the Rectory. But who could possibly want to lodge in Basset *now?*

The next morning, Dr. Richard was called out early to one of the farms on the hill. That daughter of Eve, his wife, suggested he should "just walk round" by Mrs. Whittaker's on his way back. The old Doctor's eye twinkled a little, but he was not without a mild curiosity on his own account. Having paid his visit, he returned *viâ* Mrs. Whittaker's. And, behold, the autumn garden had been trimmed and tidied; there was a clean blind and a new geranium in the window; and on the low door, a modest brass plate, highly polished, with the new, clear inscription: Dr. Mark Spencer, Physician and Surgeon.

CHAPTER V

DR. MARK

Dr. Mark Spencer was at this time about four and thirty years old; very thin and tall, with dark eyes having an intent, alert look; lithe and quick of movement; slow to speak, and rapid to decide and act; the stuff of which doers and not thinkers are made; too clever to despise the cleverness of others, but himself too clever not to see their foolishness, and too self-confident not to condemn it.

When he smiled, the smile showed a face, habitually grave, to be full of humour and sympathy, and there was generally a twinkle at the back of those serious eyes; while the mouth betrayed more sensitiveness than is a comfortable possession in a harsh world.

Spencer had overworked in his profession in London, and had prudently exiled himself to Basset for a few years, to rest and recover. Basset had been chosen as being near—but not too near—to a parson friend in Dil-

chester, and for its own unquestionable merits of peace and quietness.

Simply with the idea of keeping his hand in with a few stray patients, Spencer had put up the plate on his door. He, of course, concluded Basset was doctored by somebody; and also concluded—not very unfairly, considering the low standard attained by the country practitioner of the day—that the somebody would certainly be ignorant, and probably intemperate. The few patients Dr. Mark might filch from him would be no loss, thinks Dr. Mark; nay, it seemed likely there was room, if not *in* Basset, round Basset, for a couple of medical men without their getting greatly in each other's way. If there was not room, why, the more time for rest, country air, and those medical experiments and researches which were the absorption of his life.

To say that Spencer was ambitious in his profession would scarcely be true; for though he was of the character of which successful men are made, he at all times put the work above the wages. He saw, in fact, in the darkness which might be felt, of the medical science of the day, a great dawn faintly showing. What that dawn would reveal, he

guessed but dimly, but at least something better than most of his professional brethren, and strained every nerve to hasten the coming of the light.

When the first shock of discovering him was over, old Dr. and Mrs. Benet—Mrs. Benet especially—may be said to have regarded him much as a passenger on a stage-coach, who had reserved and obtained his seat, may have regarded the person who came running up at the last moment to find all the places occupied—the seated passenger's sensation being one of a comfortable triumph, slightly mingled with a fear that the guard might be bribed to let the late comer mount after all and crowd them unpleasantly.

The first week or two of his stay, Mrs. Benet was always *happening* to pass by Myrtle Cottage, and seeing Spencer's dark head, by the geranium in the window, bent over a book or what she described as "some of your nasty doctor's stuffs" in a zinc tray. Then she *happened* to hear of the philosophic young man's entire indifference to Mrs. Whittaker's lamentable cooking; and, somehow or other, obtained the certain and intimate knowledge that far from being disturbed by his landlady's lazy ways he calmly

blew the dust off his mantelpiece or flicked it from his writing-table with his pocket-handkerchief.

Old Benet used to laugh when his Jeannie brought him these stories and suggested that Spencer's tolerance of dust was his own affair, and that if his ways displeased Mrs. Benet it would be better if she *happened* to pass Myrtle Cottage less often. Mrs. Benet was not pleased with her good-man for making these stupid, sensible observations. She was naturally a thousand times more jealous for him than he could be for himself, and perhaps, too, with her quick, sound, unreasonable feminine intuition, she scented dangers for Dr. Richard from Spencer's advent which Dr. Richard's wisdom did not foresee for himself.

As for Spencer—beyond fervently hoping that none of them would call upon him, unless professionally, he was at first entirely oblivious of his neighbours. Then, one day, starting out for a walk, he saw Dr. Richard hoisting his stout, short person into his gig, and Neck-or-Nothing slumbering tranquilly, as usual; and the sight amused him a little. Presently, his landlady having informed him of the identity of Mrs. Benet, he encountered

the offended curiosity of her look, as, in a pair of clogs and very short skirts revealing thick, white-stockinged ankles, she made her way through the village mud—and was amused the more.

In church, on the first Sunday he attended service, when he sat just in front of the Benets, he declared afterwards he could feel the persistent hostility of Jane Benet's eye in the small of his back. From his position he could see through the open door, and presently, up the churchyard, where the first gusty wind of early autumn was blowing the leaves hither and thither, came Pollie Latimer, with the deep beaver bonnet shading a face which Dr. Mark did not find beautiful, but caught himself wishing to catch sight of again.

To be sure, at that date there was no reason for Jane Benet's enmity; Spencer had not a single patient.

It was, indeed, the very next day that he began to practise in Basset—on the wife of a small tradesman from Dilchester, who had just taken a house on the outskirts of the village, and had never, since he arrived, had a doctor at all. The wife was ill of some simple malady, which Spencer easily cured. But

the cure gained him more credit than it deserved, for if the malady had been simple, it had not been too simple for that pompous old ass, Dr. Clarke of Dilchester, to have mistaken and mistreated. Of course, in a small place—the smaller the place the greater the gossip is an invariable rule—in a couple of hours after Dr. Mark had paid that first professional call, it was a matter of common knowledge.

The tradesman never having been his patient, Dr. Benet could afford to be, and was, perfectly equable.

On the morrow, Miss Fitten's one apprentice ran a broken needle deep into her hand, and, as Spencer's house was next door to Miss Fitten's, came to him to have it extracted.

A little later, the tradesman's wife having said many good and grateful things of Dr. Mark to her neighbour, a gouty old farmer, the farmer sulkily observed that he had been paying the "old boy" for nothing for a score of months, and sent for Spencer. The young man studied the new patient out of those quick, black eyes of his; did not say much, but looked as if he knew much more than he said; and suggested a remedy or two, different to any the "old boy" had pro-

posed. The new remedies certainly did not remove the gout, but they rendered it "so tame you could stroke it," and the old farmer expressed an opinion that the young man was a darned sight less stoopid than the old, though he hadn't nothing to say against Dr. Benet—having, in point of fact, said the worst.

On one of his visits to the farmer, Dr. Mark met Peter Grant, who had come, not to minister spiritually to the sick, but to buy from him a sitting of duck's eggs. Doctor and parson liked each other from the first—they both said so little. They left the farm together—Spencer's lithe, energetic steps slowing down to suit Peter's heavy, rheumatic tread—and walked through Basset, laying the foundations of a long, silent, satisfactory friendship.

Is it necessary to say that Mrs. Benet *happened* to be looking out of her best parlour window when they passed? or that, having warmed and fed her man when he came back that afternoon, she told him what she had seen? She added that, with the defection of that wicked, drinking old Farmer Finch, she did not like the look of things at all. Dr. Richard was much more concerned

that Jeannie's comfortable fat face looked positively distressed and drawn, than with her gloomy prognostications. He said calmly that Farmer Finch was a cantankerous person, but that since he, Benet, had done all he could, it was not unnatural Finch should try some one else; that anyhow, Jeannie, Finch isn't a great loss. As for the Parson, he never saw any doctor professionally, but he had evidently done his duty, and called on Spencer, a duty which Dr. Benet proposed to fulfil himself to-morrow afternoon.

Jeannie took up her novel with a hand which was not perfectly steady; her Doctor had a pinch or two of snuff, and resumed his Dickens; and when they spoke again it was of something else.

All the young people in Basset Dr. Richard had brought into the world; and had eased the journey out of it for the grandsires of most of them. He was confident of his patients' fidelity and affection; but perhaps, as Madam was so mistrustful, he appeared a little more confident than he actually was.

He called on his rival the next day.

The two men did not dislike each other. Nay, there was much softness and kindliness in Spencer's eyes as he looked at his little

fat, wheezy, good-natured guest; while Dr. Richard's heart was sorry for the younger man's loneliness—for a life which seemed to have been all work, and to have had no time for those comfortable domestic affections which had made the best part of old Benet's own existence. It was when they drifted on to professional topics that the gulf between them yawned wide. Dr. Richard talked a good deal, and it was Dr. Mark's opinion—a positive, youthful opinion, generally, but not always, right—that your talker can by no means be thinker too, and is inevitably slight and shallow. Dr. Benet's talk, of course, revealed him to be of the old school; following, not blindly, but following in the steps of medical forebears, with eyes getting just a little too dim to descry that dawn to which Dr. Mark pressed forward, eager and certain.

Spencer sat back in his rickety old writing-chair, balanced it precariously on its back legs, and looked straight past Richard Benet's head to the dingy wall, almost as if he saw written on it the message to Darius of old. He said very little. But old Benet found, when it was time to go, there was a very strong impression left on his mind that this new young gentleman considered those fa-

miliar epidemics of typhus and cholera to be man's fault rather than God's will; that, if he would not go so far as to say with Macbeth, "Throw physic to the dogs, I'll none of it," all the same, the numerous draughts, powders, pills, without which Dr. Benet's patients would have had no satisfaction in being ill, were not only generally unnecessary, but sometimes actually harmful.

On the other hand, it was inevitable that, though Mark looked at Richard with that strong sympathy which was his charm as well as his strength and weakness, he looked upon him as deplorably—shall one say?—stick-in-the-mud and old-fashioned.

Dr. Richard puffed slowly homewards, rather liking his rival, thinking, despite himself, highly of his cleverness, shaking his good grey head over the exceedingly daring revolutionary ideas in that young black one, and for the first time realizing that Dr. Mark was a rival indeed.

The rivalry, as well as the revolutionary nature of those ideas, received ample confirmation as the weeks went on.

To-day, it was some small accident to which Spencer was summoned hurriedly; and the family of the accident found him so

much quicker and handier with his long, thin, supple fingers, than Dr. Benet, that it decided unanimously, to keep him.

Next, a young lady from town, who had heard there of Dr. Spencer's growing reputation, developed measles when she was visiting the august home of Sir Thomas and Lady Mainwaring. Knowing of Dr. Spencer's neighbourhood, she naturally asked if he might attend her. My lady's verdict of him was that Dr. Spencer was much more of a gentleman, as well as a better doctor, than the little Basset apothecary, and that in future, Thomas, we will employ him ourselves. When Sir Thomas, who had grown fond of old Benet, suggested that it was awkward to change your doctor, my lady inquired curtly why, pray, you should not change your doctor as much as your butcher?—and the matter was settled.

Old Finch called in young Spencer again and again. "You *do* do better for me than the old boy," says candid Finch. Mark answered that his treatment of the case was not materially different to his predecessor's.

"I know as you doctors have to say that," answers the farmer, winking a blood-shot eye very slowly; "pretend the first man's done

right; and do something different yourself all the time. I knows you."

Spencer laughed. "All the same, Dr. Benet treated you very well," says he.

The number of notes Mark had had to write lately to old Richard, telling him he had been called in to another, and yet another, of the old man's patients, did not lie easily on Mark's soul. He had by no means come to Basset to ruin a fellow-worker. He did not particularly want money. Still, he liked the experience—the work for the work's sake—and, as his health was improving, was not inclined to reject it. Sometimes, the interest of the thing absorbed him, and he forgot old Benet wholly. When he remembered, short of taking down his plate and leaving Basset, he did not see what he could do. The fight was fair enough; and provided it *was* fair, Spencer liked a fight, and had always found difficulties in the way add zest to the chase. He was sorry for the old man; Dr. Mark having, indeed, that last infirmity of noble minds, an inconveniently soft heart. But, after all, he did think him something of a muff, and probably pigheaded, as only ignorance can be.

At any rate, he could not accuse himself

of having kept the patients he had made by speaking smooth things to them, or yielding to their prejudices.

In that age of hermetically shut windows, Spencer had plainly proclaimed himself, in as few words as possible, the friend of fresh air. He informed not a few of the cottagers who came for his advice in the mornings before he started off on his rounds, that half their diseases came from dirt, and the other half from drink; and made them pay for the information. For, if he was in advance of old Benet in his ideas on medicine, so he was in his ideas on philanthropy. What one can get for nothing, one is apt to consider nothing worth. So Spencer insisted on the production of a modest—a very modest—fee before he looked at the sufferer's tongue, and felt his pulse. If that fee by no means covered the expensive medicine the disorders sometimes required, or compensated Dr. Mark for the care, candour, time and trouble he expended—well, that was so much the better for his soul, while the patients' self-respect was left uninjured.

Harry Latimer called, tardily, on the new man one afternoon, and brought him an invitation from Pollie to dine at the Manor.

The Latimers had not any idea of giving up old Benet as their medical adviser, a fact of which Spencer was heartily glad. There was no reason he should not dine with them; he only wished he had been able to think of a reason, or at least of an excuse which sounded like one. He hated wasting an evening in festivity; and he did not particularly like Harry. The "old squires, full of foolish opinions and fermented liquors," were a class among his new patients whom Mark despised with the fervour of an energetic and self-denying temperament; while he believed, like the pioneer he was, that from indulgence in the liquors—far short of drunkenness—came the foolishness of the opinions, and much deterioration of body and character.

Harry was not old, and he was not foolish. But he was idle, jolly, easy, self-indulgent; the type of man for whom Parson Grant and Dr. Benet could feel, and did feel, much liking; but who was inevitably antagonistic to Mark. It was on his lips to refuse to go—without any excuse. Then he remembered Pollie's face as she had come into church—that charming face, at once gay and thoughtful, with some faint shadow across its youth—

wondered why she had married Harry, and thought he would go and see.

Harry was riding, and Spencer came to the gate with him while he mounted Victoria.

Dislike being nearly always mutual, Harry had not been drawn to the "new man." He reined up when he met old Benet presently, and inquired good-naturedly if "young Sawbones there" was doing him much mischief? Dr. Benet, knowing that to advertise failure is to spread it, answered that he thought not —competition was healthy, plenty of room for two; the usual formulas. But it was with his grey head very bent, and old eyes not a little dull and sad, that he turned into his house, where Jeannie was on the doorstep, agitatedly agog to know if the Squire had been to see that man professionally?

Spencer looked out from an exceedingly tumbled wardrobe his only brocaded evening waistcoat; on the evening appointed, dined at the Manor; sat next to an arch, coy, simpering, middle-aged girl, who quickly bored him into a gloomy silence. At dinner, he caught himself watching Mrs. Latimer attentively as she sat at the head of her table, lively and talking, but quite simply interested in and proud of her shining dinner-

party damask and china. Once, at dessert, he observed the glance of tolerant affection she gave to Harry, with his good-looking face reddening comfortably over the port; and into Dr. Mark's mind flashed the phrase of the French philosopher, "On a tant d'indulgence quand on n'a plus d'amour!"

Spencer did not make himself more popular with his host after dinner by declining to refill his glass as the great cut-glass decanters went their frequent rounds. Harry—and many another besides Harry in that day—measured a man's manliness by the depth of his potations. And the Squire was something annoyed that to this abstemious and silent person—lithe, active, determined—it was wholly impossible to apply the epithet of milksop.

After Spencer had counted out, with Mrs. Latimer, the counters for a game of Pope Joan, he returned home as soon as might be.

He had walked the Paris hospitals, and was studying now—he was very likely the only English medical man of his day who did so—the works of the great French doctors, Tissot, Tronchin, Cabanis. His profession had been always his only mistress—almost his only friend—all-engrossing and sufficient.

But this evening his thoughts wandered. He pushed aside Cabanis' "Rapports du Physique et du Moral de l'Homme," and looked round the room; and it struck him for the first time as untidy and comfortless.

Then, with a frown at his own inattention, he resumed his book.

It was not long after the Manor dinner-party that Spencer bought himself a horse; his practice having increased so fast that it was impossible to keep pace with it on foot. After that, because nothing succeeds like success, it increased further still.

It was not, of course, that old Dr. Benet had no patients; he still had some, where but a few months ago he had had all. A good many of the poor, feeling that the doctoring was better when you paid for it, but not being able to pay, returned to their first love. There were both farms and manors round Basset which had never made any change. Most of Dr. Benet's Dilchester patients were faithful; but, on the other hand, a good many of Dr. Clarke's of Dilchester had gone over to Spencer of Basset, who was less handy, but, when you got him, less dangerous. Conservative Miss Pilkington—the Pilkington family having been ushered in and out of the

world by a Benet these last seventy years—would rather have died than have been doctored by any one else. But that was something less to her credit, because she felt sure she would die most certainly if she exposed herself to the tricks of a young gentleman who, in her own phrase, "believed in draughts," meaning ventilation, and disbelieved in them, meaning the row of great bottles on the mantelpiece.

In church now, if looks could kill, Dr. Mark would have been stabbed (in the back) many a time. If he was sorry for her husband, Mrs. Benet he regarded simply as an angry, ugly, old woman, who decidedly tickled his sense of humour.

Spencer had come to Basset in early autumn.

The winter was unhealthy but hardly more unhealthy than usual. March brought a spell of bitter weather, and an epidemic of influenza so virulent and widespread that even Dr. Benet, with his lessening practice, was busy, and his young rival, far from finding Basset a rest cure, had scarcely time to eat or sleep. In the midst of it, Tommy Latimer, who had been thrown by his pony half a dozen times and picked himself up again as

uninjured as an indiarubber ball, elected to be thrown once more; picked himself up, swallowing unmanly sobs, and complained of his back. Harry was agreeably certain, as usual, it was a trifle; and, thus convinced, rode off to keep an appointment in Dilchester. Pollie sent for Dr. Benet. Dr. Benet, having carefully examined the child, pronounced the injuries slight. Before the afternoon, Pollie had sent for him again. The child looked ill, and complained of greater pain.

"When Harry was so bad," says Pollie, "you sent for Dr. Clarke. Only now, perhaps, you might have Dr. Spencer? He is so near, and he seems to be so much cleverer than Dr. Clarke, isn't he?"

Lies stuck in old Benet's throat; but if an honest man can wish he was a liar—and, be sure, he can—Dr. Richard wished it then.

Spencer was sent for, and came. The two men examined the child together. Was Dr. Mark something surprised, and ever so little disappointed, that he had to concur absolutely in old Benet's diagnosis of the case as trivial? If he was, he was ashamed of the sensation when he saw the relief in Pollie's eyes. She opened the hall door to the two

men, thanking them; and they walked down the drive in silence. The younger man was by nature too shy and reserved to be able to bridge over a difficulty by conversation; besides, he was thinking of something else; and in the heart of the old one was a great bitterness.

When he got home—it was nearly four o'clock in the afternoon—he did not attempt to minimize to his wife, as he had persistently done hitherto, the rise in his rival's and the fall in his own fortunes. Jeannie followed him into the dining-room. It was snowing softly outside, and the room looked light, white, and cheerless.

It was not so much the loss of money old Richard felt, though he did feel that. But if they were poor, there was that very little independent fortune to keep them from want, and Jeannie was a manager in a thousand. It was the faithlessness of his people that lay heavy on his soul. He knew he had always done his best for them; he believed that that best had been, in the main, not unsuccessful. With not a few of them, he had been down into those deep places of intimate confidence and knowledge into which in sickness of body, the soul—willingly or unwillingly—

sometimes takes a friend. He had seen many sores and secrets—of the heart; and, cheery old talker though he was, never a hint of them had passed his lips or looked out of his eyes. To be sure, he had only done his duty. But the duties of his profession exact a greater self-denial and a higher virtue than any other. If he had been paid only by the affection and fidelity of his patients, he would have felt himself well paid. And behold! after forty years spent in their service, in six months nearly half of them had deserted him.

Jeannie poured out a sudden tornado of angry words against the deserters, and the character and conduct of Dr. Mark. Her old man looked ill and sunken, and her heart was hot within her. He stretched out his cold hand to pat hers in the accustomed caress, and said, "No, no, Jeannie, Spencer has always acted honourably."

And Jeannie, who cried so enjoyably and profusely over sham griefs in a novel, and would have despised herself for ever if her doctor had caught her weeping at a real trouble, gave a sudden, loud, vindictive sniff, and retreated to the kitchen to prepare his dinner, where, since "there is no seeing one's way through tears," she brushed them away

with the back of her hand, and tried to think of a dish that would tempt him.

When Maggie went into the dining-room to lay the cloth, she had to clear her throat loudly three times before the Doctor—who was sitting with his folded arms leaning on the table, staring at the drab wall-paper opposite—heard the hint and made way for her.

A very few days later, when the snow was thick on the ground, Dr. Richard, having been called out very early in the morning, did not return home until six o'clock in the evening. All through their belated dinner, the old pair hardly spoke; and Maggie confided to the boy from the shop, who had knocked at the back door with the express purpose of throwing a snowball at her when she opened it, that the two in there had been a-quarrelling. Her sharp young eyes were rather disappointed to see no traces of a fray when she brought in the evening tea. While Jeannie was brewing it, the old doctor, who had not taken his book as usual, said—

"It was Spencer I was called to this morning, Jeannie. He's down with the influenza."

Mrs. Benet responded by a snort, which, if ever snort said anything, said, "Serve him right!" and went on with her tea-making.

"I went to see him again this evening," said Dr. Richard. "The fact is, I don't like his symptoms at all. He's a delicate man, and he has been very much out of health. I don't trust Mrs. Whittaker to look after him—she's a deal too plausible—and I can't find any one else. That old woman, Muggleton, is down with the thing herself."

Mrs. Benet gave the Doctor his cup, and sat down with her own; and was understood to remark that, as Dr. Spencer was so mighty clever, he had better cure himself.

"It isn't good doctoring he wants, Jeannie," says Richard, "it's good nursing."

Mrs. Benet replied, "Oh, it's nursing, is it?" very snappishly, and there was a long pause. Then she gave the Doctor his second cup, and with it the new *Edinburgh,* just come from the Dilchester Book Club. But he put the volume on one side.

"I am not easy about him, Jeannie, and that's the fact. Ask Maggie for my boots, and I'll go round and sit with him for an hour, and see if that woman has done what I told her."

Then Jeannie rose in her ire.

"You're cold and tired, and you haven't eaten any dinner," she said. "And you're

sixty-eight years old, and he's done you a lot of harm, and you shan't go and kill yourself for him. You sit still where you are and drink that tea, and I'll manage him."

If she had substituted "murder" for "manage," she could not have uttered it more bloodthirstily. Dr. Richard had not felt like laughing for many a day, but he did smile to himself then.

Mrs. Benet was out of the room about twenty minutes. When she returned, she had put on her clogs, girded up her skirts, pinned on a stout plaid shawl with a brooch, hung a strong basket on her arm, and was in the act of tying her bonnet strings in a large, fierce bow.

Dr. Richard looked up from the *Edinburgh* which he was pretending to read, and said, "Thank you, Jeannie."

"Now mind," says Jeannie, still considerably ruffled in temper, "if I'm not back by ten, you're to lock the front door, and not to trust it to Maggie. And if I'm not home tomorrow before you're up, you're to put on the new flannel shirt I've just finished. It's on the chair by the bed. They're warmer before they're washed. And, mind, you're not to change it because it scratches. It's

the scratching that keeps up the circulation."

"It is, Jeannie," says old Richard, feelingly. If the shirt had been of hair, he would have consented to wear it.

In a minute he added, "The medicines I've ordered Spencer are on the mantelpiece, and the directions on the bottles. Keep the room warm, and keep him as quiet as you can. I'll be round by nine o'clock to-morrow morning." He gave a few more technical instructions, and Jeannie listened with a face at once hostile, sensible, and attentive.

Then he said again, "Thank you, Jeannie," and felt for one of her fat old hands under her shawl. She responded by giving him a sound thump on his shoulder. She might have liked, perhaps, to have kissed him on the top of his untidy grey head, but under the circumstances would have felt such a caress to be lowering to her self-respect; so she contented herself with the thump and a look at him which said many contrary things.

In the passage, she added a stout gingham umbrella to her other luggage (for it was again snowing fast), and tramped out into the cold and the darkness.

It should not be necessary to say that

Mark Spencer had not summoned Dr. Richard before it was absolutely essential. Keenly interested as he was in disease as disease, he was also the least fanciful of human beings regarding his own maladies; and his interest in them was purely impersonal, which is tantamount to saying that Heaven had expressly designed him to be a doctor. His strong confidence in his star, united to strong self-confidence, always made him sure, when he was ill, that he would certainly recover.

But on this occasion, after having ignored his symptoms for many days—being, in fact, particularly engrossed with the symptoms of other people—there came that snowy morning when he literally could not get up and go out as usual—even if his medical knowledge had not convinced him, in spite of himself, of the madness of such a proceeding. Now, too, the extreme mental depression, which was a characteristic of the influenza of that day, as of later days, overwhelmed him like a thick cloud.

He had passed a sleepless and feverish night. In the cold morning light, the ill-furnished and disorderly room looked barren and miserable exceedingly. Dr. Mark saw clearly, not only the disadvantages of life—

that view can be taken philosophically—but of his own life. The obstacles in the path in which he was resolved to tread seemed insurmountable; he was alone, and no man cared for his soul.

Thus feeling, when Mrs. Whittaker brought him a cup of lukewarm tea instead of breakfast, and said pleasantly, "Lor, sir! you do look bad. I shouldn't wonder if you was one of them as goes off very quick," and he believed her, he realized it was time to send for his rival.

An old woman in a cottage had one day candidly told Dr. Mark that she preferred Dr. Richard; he was "so comfortable." Spencer remembered that observation when old Benet sank wheezily on to the ricketty chair by the bed, and looked at him with that steady blue eye, which seemed to say reassuringly that one's sufferings might be very real without being very serious. If there were jealousy and bitterness in the old Doctor's soul, they were certainly not in his manner. But Spencer's shrewdness had always given his rival credit for being worthy and kindly—in fact, a good old woman.

What surprised him was that, after a very few questions, and the usual formulas, Dr.

Benet had not only discovered old scars, which Mark believed healing nature had covered or effaced, and weaknesses and tendencies which it must needs take a good intelligence or a long time to find out, but that he had also thoroughly gauged his patient's temperament, and if he did not know much about the sickness, by some shrewd intuition certainly did know the sick man.

When the old Doctor recommended remedies, contrary to all the young one's best theories, Spencer found himself, to his own surprise, not only consenting to take them, but feebly wondering if there might not be some good in them after all.

The two spoke together for a few minutes about those new patients of Mark's, who had once been Dr. Richard's, and whom Dr. Richard must needs take over again until his rival had recovered; and it was not Dr. Richard who found the subject most painful. When he rose to go, he said he would look in again in the evening. Spencer answered hoarsely, it was not necessary. But as he lay weak and aching through the cold and wretched day—with its solitude only broken by the rare appearances of Mrs. Whittaker's amiable and untidy head round the bed cur-

tains—he caught himself trusting that the old boy had not taken him at his word. And when Dr. Benet did come creaking in again—to find that Mrs. Whittaker, who had readily promised to do everything he had bidden her, had done nothing—Mark owned humbly to his own heart that he was glad.

After that, he was too ill to be glad or sorry about anything. The cold March twilight came in through the uncurtained window. The miserable fire went out. Mark passed first into that strange borderland when one is neither sensible nor senseless; conscious, but only of supreme discomfort; and at last fell into a restless sleep, filled with troubled dreams.

When he woke up, not knowing whether he had been asleep five minutes or as many hours, he thought he was dreaming still.

There was a cheerful fire in the grate, and its pleasant flicker in the room. A kettle sang on the hob. Through a long hole in his tattered bed curtain, he further perceived that a plaid shawl had been hung over the bare window. His clothes, which he had left half on a chair, and half on the floor, had been neatly folded. On the mantelpiece, the goodly row of black bottles ordered by Dr.

Benet had been supplemented by more bottles, a teapot, and a milk-jug. On the chair by the bed there was a tray, and a glass with a cooling drink in it. Spencer also saw that, while he slept, his very bed—perhaps even himself—had been tidied, as by a master hand. There was an extra and spotless blanket over his feet. On a nail on his wall hung a large and decent female bonnet of Dunstable black straw. And seated in a rocking-chair by the fire, with her madonna front surmounted by a night-cap, her manly dressing-gown of grey flannel tied by the sleeves round her neck to afford extra warmth—with her hands clasped on her capacious lap, her eyes closed, and her face perfectly alert, wakeful, and determined —sat the author of all the changes.

Mark was for the moment annoyed, but too ill to be keenly annoyed; then, being weak, and deficient in his usual abundant self-control, he had to stuff a corner of the sheet into his mouth to prevent himself from laughing out loud. He did not make a sound. But in two minutes, his curtains had been drawn back, and there, like avenging Eleanor presenting the poisoned bowl to Rosamund, stood Mrs. Benet with a long medicine glass in her hand. She offered no explanations of

her appearance or her *rôle*. She merely observed with a Roman simplicity and sternness, that it was time for the medicine; and Mark found himself draining to the last drop the long, nauseous and slimy draught—of which he entirely disapproved—as if he liked it.

After that, Mrs. Benet announced that he must go to sleep; and he slept, as he said himself later, because he did not dare to keep awake.

When he did wake, a March morning sunshine filled the room; the window had been shorn of its plaid; the nurse, in it and her bonnet, was standing by his side to make the announcement that she was leaving him for an hour to see to her old man. Spencer, whose tongue was as slow to express gratitude as his heart was quick to feel it, tried to thank her, and begged her not to return. She shook her head at him meditatively, as if to inquire what he fancied would become of him if she did not. When Dr. Benet arrived at nine, Spencer, thanking him again, declared he need not further trouble his wife; and old Benet said, "You don't know Jeannie."

If he did not, he was to know her soon.

In a few days he began positively to like the broad face which he had thought merely ugly and absurd, and the sound of her steady step and voice. Under the circumstances, it was not perhaps surprising that she should insist—well knowing his conceited mistrust of medicines—not only that he should take all those her husband had ordered, but some patent home-made ones which she took in addition to old Benet's remedies when she herself was ill, and to which she always ascribed her cure. A little judicious starvation in the early stages of influenza was one of the new articles of Spencer's medical creed, and lo! at all hours of the day and night he found himself fed up with strong broths and port wine; while Mrs. Benet further caused some particularly solid and life-giving soup (a speciality of Pollie's cook) to be sent down from the Manor.

Knowing his nonsensical partiality for fresh air, she firmly nailed up strips of cloth all round the window (which, of course, was never opened) lest by any chance even the smallest amount of oxygen should penetrate through the cracks. Spencer often had to put his head under the bed-clothes now to silence his chuckles. He had believed, not

wrongly, that he had a great deal of determination of character. But those who are the slowest to yield to force are sometimes the readiest to yield to kindness.

One day, when old Queen Eleanor brought him a steaming cup of beef-tea, Spencer looked up at her with a twinkle in his eyes and said, "Don't you wish it was poison?" and with something very like an answering twinkle in hers, Eleanor replied, "Young man, you are uncommonly lucky it's not."

Somehow, after that, there was a bridge over the differences between them; and, a little doubtfully and shamefacedly, they began to cross it.

The nurse's brisk, healthy manner of treating disease as a brief, tiresome accident, particularly appealed to a patient who was always ashamed of himself if he had a sick mind because he had a sick body. The ruthless way in which she, morally, pulverized Mrs. Whittaker to dust, when that lady put her head into the room with futile offers of assistance, also did the invalid a great deal of good.

Soon, when old Benet paid his visit, Spencer took to watching keenly the wife's

face as her husband talked; and he liked the stern, dogged fidelity with which she carried out the old Doctor's instructions—especially when she knew they were likely to be disapproved of by the young one.

Now and again, as she sat knitting her good-man a pair of stockings, she let fall things she had heard, from quite impartial outsiders, in his praise. One day, she told her patient the story of a case in Dilchester, which the London bigwigs had given up as hopeless, and *her* doctor had pronounced curable—and cured. And, indeed, as Spencer grew to know his rival better, the more he respected the Doctor, as well as liked the man; and his pride had to confess that he had mistaken for a stiff-necked country fool a wise old person who had something very like an inborn genius for discovering disease, and mother-wit worth all the learning of the schools.

On her side, old Madam soon divined—somehow, for Mark was a man who found it absolutely impossible to bestow confidences—the story of his solitary and determined youth, and of success, quickly followed by ill-health. Instead of a medical Juggernaut, with his car crushing in cruel triumph other people's

practice and happiness, she saw a nature singularly sensitive and compassionate. Of course, being still in love with her old man, she immediately imparted to him all her discoveries, and Richard said simply, "Well, you know, Jeannie, I always liked Spencer personally from the first, only I didn't dare to tell you so."

By the time Mark had guessed at the one lack in his new friends' lives—their childlessness—Jeannie was mothering *him*. Her quaint figure still moved him to smiles—under the bed-clothes—when he looked at her, but now she and her husband had come into it, he no longer felt himself alone in the world he meant to conquer. He read, and liked to read, their homely love-story. While, on her side, Jeannie, as she brewed him beef-tea or washed up his tea-cup and medicine-glasses, mentally scoured Basset for a wife for him, and even cast a bird's-eye view over Dilchester with the same end.

When, at the end of two or three weeks, he grew better, and she only came every now and then for an hour, and finally merely looked in upon him two or three times a day, he positively decided that, despite the work awaiting him and the brief time accorded to

any mortal to do it, he was not perfectly glad he was getting well.

One day, as he sat in an armchair by the fire, she entered his bedroom suddenly, in her grim bonnet, and—after they had exchanged the briefest of greetings, and without having asked such a superfluity as his permission—began calmly and thoroughly to overhaul his wardrobe.

The next day, when he was promoted to his sitting-room for the first time, he beheld her, through its window, to his great amusement, carrying home, fully exposed to the gaze of Basset, an armful of his unmended clothing, of which socks were by far the most decent items.

It was now that those two old cronies, Peter Grant and Tommy Latimer, came to call on him; Peter, sitting looking into the fire in a compassionate silence; and Tommy, in the old armchair opposite, positively bursting with suppressed questions—his mother having prudently warned him it would be rude to ask any.

Later, came Mr. and Mrs. Latimer themselves. Mrs. Latimer brought a jelly in a shape, and Mark liked to watch the engrossed interest she took in turning it out,

whole and perfect, on to a plate. She found his deep, attentive eyes upon her face, when she had finished that important work, and met them with her frank, clear look.

While he and Harry were talking—or Harry was talking and Spencer appearing to listen—she took up a number of the *Quarterly* from among Mark's heterogeneous possessions—the *Quarterly* still in its "boisterous youth"—and Mark saw her pucker her white forehead as her quick and uninstructed intelligence came across some allusion she did not catch. When she put down the book and joined in the conversation, he was surprised at the acuteness of her sympathies and the ready comprehensions of her heart; for he knew that it is those who have suffered themselves who feel for others, and that the heart only understands what it has endured.

Three or four days after, Harry came again, alone.

Since "one can hardly hate any one that one knows," he and Spencer got on much better now than at their first meetings. Harry was full of *bonhomie* and kindness. This time, he brought Mark, Daniel's "Rural Sports," the only book he ever willingly opened himself, and so the only book

he could conceive any other man wishing to read. Then, too, his jolly, healthy aspect was strengthening like a tonic. He hospitably invited Spencer to come and recruit for a week or two at the Manor—it looks so deucedly uncomfortable here, says candid Harry. Spencer only paused a second before refusing the invitation. But Harry was quite clever enough to see that he actually wanted to come; what was beyond his comprehension was that any one should wish to do some perfectly possible thing, and not do it.

He went off, contemplatively whistling, and reflected on such queerness for quite three or four minutes.

But if Spencer was not, as he had said, well enough to be a guest at the Manor, he was apparently well enough to be a pretty constant visitor at the Benets'.

He spent almost every evening there now. His long legs filled up most of the little parlour. Before Maggie brought in the tea-things, the professional books were produced from the surgery, and old Benet's rumpled grey head and Mark's dark one met together over those thick volumes. The old man, as ever, talked a good deal, and the young one

very little. Mrs. Benet, who was quite unblushingly engaged in darning Mark's woollen drawers, held up her needle to thread it at the candlelight, and now and then made a short, sensible suggestion. Maggie's cheerful singing came from the kitchen; and Queen Caroline, being tried over the mantelpiece, looked down on a scene both pleasant and peaceful.

Basset used to see, and comment on the fact, that the invalid walked back quite late, on uncommonly chilly spring evenings, to Myrtle Cottage, though it was still stated he was not well enough to visit or to receive patients.

One day, it beheld him being taken by old Benet and Neck-or-Nothing into Dilchester. Neck-or-Nothing had quite three-quarters of an hour's good sleep outside the office of Messrs. Rastrick and Dodd, solicitors, while his passengers were within.

Soon after, Basset observed that the brass plates outside Myrtle Cottage and Dr. Benet's house were both missing. There was a brief, blank interval. Then they were replaced, each bearing the inscription—

DRS. BENET AND SPENCER,
Physicians and Surgeons.

CHAPTER VI

THE WHITE COTTAGE

WHILE the partnership between Drs. Richard and Mark was still a new thing and a nine days' wonder, Basset actually found itself in the throes of yet another excitement. Miss Pilkington's niece was coming to live with her.

Rachel Pilkington was the fourth of "old Pil's" five motherless daughters.

For many years his Rectory house had been efficiently managed by Eliza, the eldest and the most disagreeable of the flock. The four younger sisters spent their time in doing little duties and kindnesses in the village, in copying music, drawing in crayons, practising the harp and the art of keeping their temper when Eliza lost hers.

Rachel was a little, slight, delicate, sensitive creature, with rather a high spirit, and thin cheeks which easily flushed. At sixteen, she alone of the sisters went to a boarding-school in Dilchester, where she was

taught, with eleven other young ladies, how to enter and leave with grace a carriage permanently stationed in the back yard; and where she might have said with Miss Billickin, "a poorness of blood flowed from the table which has run through my life."

She returned to Basset Rectory in the state of genteel starvation, not then at all unusual in girls educated at polite academies.

While old Benet was still pouring into her port wine and most of the drugs in his pharmacopœia, Sophy, her youngest sister, was married to a Yorkshire curate. Rachel's life scarcely knew another event until, some fifteen years later, old Pilkington died, leaving his daughters to face the world on a pittance of about a hundred a year each.

They had so long sat together in a pleasant breakfast parlour doing nothing that need have been done, and trying not to tread, metaphorically, on each other's toes, that they unanimously decided to part company at once. Eliza elected to live in Dilchester, and Rachel, intensely conservative, faithful and affectionate—Rachel, who felt her native village to be the hub of the universe and was not without the rather comforting idea that, if she left, the hub would not

work—took the White Cottage, about four doors from the Benets', and settled in Basset for ever.

She was at this time five and fifty—five and fifty being then a good ten years older than it is now. She was liberal and generous to a fault, devoutly religious, and with great purity and simplicity of nature. She laid up for herself no treasure on earth; let not her left hand know what her right hand did; blessed them which cursed her, and prayed for them that despitefully used her; or, in other words, had most of the qualities which exasperate sensible people, spell failure for this world, and are the ideal attributes of the Sermon on the Mount.

It must be added that, at the same time, Rachel was warmly human. She was very glad to be parted from her sisters, though she was very sorry she was glad. She had, as had all the Pilkingtons, a great deal of family pride. On the strength of their descent from a mythical Sir Pylke, who had—of course—come over with the Conqueror, they were all imbued with the comfortable idea that, as a family, they could not possibly do wrong. Rachel was about four feet two inches high, but felt quite tall, on the principle that a

Pilkington must inevitably be the right height; while the same faith in the family infallibility caused her loyally to think that old Pilkington had done well in living, as Harry Latimer put it, like a fighting cock, and leaving his daughters to penury.

It was naturally a dreadful wrench to Rachel to leave the Rectory; and when she saw Peter Grant's coarse and shabby effects being moved into parlours hitherto sacred to Pilkingtons, and into the room where Rachel's mother had died—years and years ago—she had to take to her bed for three or four days, quite ill from agitation. The calming powders Dr. Benet administered did her less good than his wife's visit of sympathy, when the expression on old Jeannie's face clearly showed that she thought Miss Pilkington a fool.

She soon settled down, however, to her new life—with a faint regret for past affluence, but soothed by the feeling that, whatever Fate did, one, after all, remained a Pilkington—and accepted her straitened circumstances with great courage and cheerfulness.

Not at all clever in anything else, she managed gifts and benefactions to the

face as her husband talked; and he liked the stern, dogged fidelity with which she carried out the old Doctor's instructions—especially when she knew they were likely to be disapproved of by the young one.

Now and again, as she sat knitting her good-man a pair of stockings, she let fall things she had heard, from quite impartial outsiders, in his praise. One day, she told her patient the story of a case in Dilchester, which the London bigwigs had given up as hopeless, and *her* doctor had pronounced curable—and cured. And, indeed, as Spencer grew to know his rival better, the more he respected the Doctor, as well as liked the man; and his pride had to confess that he had mistaken for a stiff-necked country fool a wise old person who had something very like an inborn genius for discovering disease, and mother-wit worth all the learning of the schools.

On her side, old Madam soon divined—somehow, for Mark was a man who found it absolutely impossible to bestow confidences—the story of his solitary and determined youth, and of success, quickly followed by ill-health. Instead of a medical Juggernaut, with his car crushing in cruel triumph other people's

practice and happiness, she saw a nature singularly sensitive and compassionate. Of course, being still in love with her old man, she immediately imparted to him all her discoveries, and Richard said simply, "Well, you know, Jeannie, I always liked Spencer personally from the first, only I didn't dare to tell you so."

By the time Mark had guessed at the one lack in his new friends' lives—their childlessness—Jeannie was mothering *him*. Her quaint figure still moved him to smiles—under the bed-clothes—when he looked at her, but now she and her husband had come into it, he no longer felt himself alone in the world he meant to conquer. He read, and liked to read, their homely love-story. While, on her side, Jeannie, as she brewed him beef-tea or washed up his tea-cup and medicine-glasses, mentally scoured Basset for a wife for him, and even cast a bird's-eye view over Dilchester with the same end.

When, at the end of two or three weeks, he grew better, and she only came every now and then for an hour, and finally merely looked in upon him two or three times a day, he positively decided that, despite the work awaiting him and the brief time accorded to

Rover—of whom she was moreover very timid—sacrilegiously strolling into the chancel whenever he thought fit. But she was such a really pious woman that on one occasion, in the Litany, when she saw a mouse in the corner of her neglected pew—as it were, menacing her—she kept quite a quarter of her devout attention on the service, and only three parts on the enemy. Sarah was sent up to the pew next day with a mouse-trap; and also—it was really necessary—brought with her a patent blackbeetle exterminator, invented by a Pilkington grandmother.

In fiction, the typical old maid always spends her evening weeping "over the shoulder knot that sleeps within her cuff-box," or pondering over the dear, dead days of love and youth.

There had been no love—in a sense, hardly any real youth—for Rachel. She had always been without that exquisite illusiveness—called charm; and for the only pursuit then permitted to women, the pursuit of a husband, she had had too much pride and delicacy. So not having even a dog or a Cause like a modern spinster, she sat alone in the long evenings; sometimes divested the harp of its green baize suit, and sang to it;

and, if it had not been one of the best established Pilkington traditions that the whole family inevitably sang true, would have fancied the thinness and sharpness of old age in her voice.

One day, when Basset was still gaping and gasping at the new plate on the doctors' doors, Rachel received a letter from her sister Sophy; and, the letter arriving in the morning, saved it to enjoy over her evening tea. Not that Sophy's letters were generally enjoyable, the first sheet being, as a rule, filled with lamentations on her poverty, and the second with envy of Rachel's superior wealth and comforts; for, as Sophy very justly said, a single woman is rich on a hundred pounds a year compared with a family of seven, exclusive of parents, on two hundred and fifty.

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though the doctors *were* in partnership, the old man might yet have feelings about the young one being preferred before him.

However, Rachel yielded to the very gentle persistence by which Ann always had her own way. Only, as luck would have it, Mark was absent for the whole day in Dilchester, and old Benet came in his place. The pain in the arm did not seem to him at all serious. At least, he simply sent for its relief a bottle of white liquid which smelt, felt, and looked exactly like water, and said he need not call again.

Three days later, Rachel and the patient received an invitation to a small evening party at Mrs. Benet's.

If truth be told, Mrs. Benet's parties were not much more exhilarating than Miss Pilkington's, but they had the merit of being rarer.

On the present occasion, Mark Spencer, Mrs. Rastrick from Dilchester, Rachel and Ann found themselves, with their host and hostess, at six o'clock in the evening, in Mrs. Benet's best parlour—with its furniture clothed in covers of green and purple wool, artificial fruit under one glass case, pink wax fox and hounds under another, the

wool parrots leering with their boot-buttons of eyes from the mantelpiece, and, pervading the room, the cold smell of disuse.

Mrs. Rastrick, who was a complaining elderly lady in a large turban, sat next to Miss Pilkington, and breathed into her always sympathetic ear laments on life, husbands, and servants. Rachel punctuated the stories by nodding her head very interestedly and emphatically, and racked her brain for methods of helping Mrs. Rastrick—Mrs. Rastrick being in every respect immeasurably more capable and fortunate than Rachel herself. Dr. Benet chatted cheerily to Ann, who was delightfully fresh and dimpled in a much-washed muslin; and Spencer's *tête-à-tête* with his hostess was considerably interrupted by that lady keeping one eye on Ann's appearance and character, and the other on the door, anticipating that Maggie would be late with the tea.

After the banquet—genteelly handed on a tray—the four elders settled down to commerce, played for a very little money. Ann was provided as entertainments with a volume of "The Keepsake," and with Dr. Mark Spencer.

Spencer was by no means an impassive

old dullard like Peter Grant. He was not at all insensible to the charms of Ann's exquisite youth; to the sweep of the dark lashes on her cheek, as she looked down at the book in her lap; to the cool and fragrant air that hung about her; and to her good breeding. Nor was she more difficult to talk to than many an ugly woman, and Spencer easily sustained with her a not thrillingly interesting conversation. He was quite aware —and amused, not disconcerted, at the knowledge—that Mrs. Benet was listening to every word of it, while she kept at the same time a brisk mastery over her hand of cards.

When the game was over, Maggie, who was panting by now as if the party had been a race, brought in the tray again—on this occasion containing cakes and wine and water.

Precisely at nine o'clock, Mrs. Rastrick, having exchanged the large turban for a large bonnet, and anticipating a bronchitis from the night air, was packed into her chaise; Sarah "fetched" Miss Pilkington and Ann and escorted them to the White Cottage—about twelve paces from the Benets' house. Mrs. Benet reclad the best parlour in holland,

and covered her Sunday merino with a black silk apron. She, Spencer and her old man thankfully repaired to the living-room, where she made a really good brew of tea in the old brown teapot, which, of course, did its duty much better than the grand silver one; Maggie brought in a heaped dish of the cakes and sandwiches which had survived the party; each man took his accustomed, comfortable chair; and in ten minutes old Benet was deep in his fifth reading of "Peter Simple," his wife in Lady Blessington's last novel "The Slaves of Society" (feeling she had been in a measure one of them herself), and Mark in the current *Blackwood.*

They read in a pleasant, sociable silence for about half an hour. Then Mrs. Benet looked up at Mark, and said, "Well, will she do?"

Spencer laughed, "She wouldn't have me, if I asked her," he answered, stretching out his long legs, and contemplating the large boots at the end of them.

"Oh!" says old Jeannie. "Well, if you don't want her, don't ask her, that's all;" and they relapsed into silence and their books.

The next day, a bibulous old pensioner of

Rachel Pilkington's called upon her, demanding—for that last time which never is the last—a little monetary assistance. At the end of their conversation, he begged her pardon, but thought she and her miss would like to know that the Chantry had been took, he couldn't rightly say by who.

No one who has lived for any length of time in a small, remote village will be greatly surprised to hear, ten minutes after receiving this intelligence, Ann and Miss Pilkington were in their shawls and bonnets, making an excursion to Sir John's domain, which was about a quarter of a mile away. In its garden, they found the old gardener, who acted as caretaker when the house was empty.

He informed them that the news was correct, and that in a week's time he expected the tenants, whom he had not seen, and of whom he knew nothing but their name—Mr. and Mrs. Darbisher.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHANTRY

THE Chantry was a low, sunny house, with a rose garden sloping to a terrace with a sun-dial. In a pleasant oak-panelled parlour—having a door and windows opening on the garden—Lady Lucy, Sir John Railton's mother, had been used to sit reading and embroidering by a work-table, with its deep well full of many coloured embroidery silks. Little John used to plunge his small hands into their softness, and always remembered—for it is such trifles the memory keeps longest and clearest—the feeling and the brightness of them.

Lady Lucy died when he was six, but he might have said with Cowper, "Such was the impression her tenderness made upon me, though the opportunity she had for showing it was so short," that her influence never quite died out of his life. It was certainly its associations with her which prevented him from selling the Chantry. It bored him hor-

ribly, as has been said, when he came back to it. But he liked to think of it standing there, as it had stood in her day, with the same books and pictures and her little mahogany writing-table—a feeling that did not prevent him from letting it when luck and times were bad.

The afternoon following Miss Pilkington's and Ann's visit to the house, Rachel happened—providentially as she said—to be sitting at her parlour window, when there came through Basset at a trot a travelling carriage much cumbered with luggage.

From it, a female head, rather gay as to its bonnet and with a floating veil, constantly emerged, to say something to a very young horseman with a handsome boyish face and the newest thing in riding-coats, who, as the female head always retired into the carriage as quickly as it had popped out, might have guessed to be somewhat curt and snubbing in his replies. Dr. Benet, who was at his gate dismounting from his gig as the carriage passed, thought the emerging head was an *old* woman's; Miss Pilkington said the bonnet would be a highly improper one for any elderly person.

These conflicting opinions were settled by

Harry Latimer receiving a letter from a friend, asking him to make welcome in Basset the writer's sister and nephew, Mrs. Darbisher and her son.

Mrs. Darbisher was, in point of fact, about fifty; one of those clever, foolish, entertaining and irresponsible women whom, for the amusement and confusion of the world, we have always with us, but who were perhaps more common seventy years ago than they are now. Julia Darbisher made up for a lack of all education, except of the most trivial and useless kind, by a much more valuable asset—a great deal of mother-wit. She had a very lively imagination and a very warm heart, a voluble and not scrupulously truthful tongue; she was kind and easy-going to a fault; extremely untidy, absolutely good-natured—in brief, a charming person to have as a friend, but a little difficult to deal with as a relation.

She had been early left a widow with an only son and a sufficient, comfortable income.

She had shamefully spoilt Lionel—and was quite surprised that he became wilful and undutiful. She had brought him up to think himself superior to every one—and then was

a little grieved to discover that he thought himself superior to her.

He was, indeed, clever—though not, of course, half so clever as he and she thought—as well as honest and quick tempered, and at twenty-two, very, very young indeed. Though he had been brought up at his mother's apron-strings—or at a private school and a tutor's, which comes to almost the same thing—he was no milk-sop.

After three years at Oxford, he had insisted on travelling abroad, often out of the beaten track—and that at a period when the ordinary Briton made sure that a week's feeding on anything but his own roast beef would poison him—and had proved himself to have grit and enterprise. It was not the irksome fact that his mother held the purse-strings—for she was, even in her own despite, the most liberal of women—that recalled him to England much sooner than he intended, but the agonized anticipations in her letters that every ship or *diligence* her dearest Li entered would undoubtedly kill him, and the fact, conveyed by an officious relative, that anxiety was really making her ill.

Of course, he felt it due to himself to be distinctly cross when he did return.

His mother's impressive horror at the free-thinking opinions of a young Scotchman Lionel had met on his travels, egged him on to imply darkly that he himself shared them. His strictures on the horrible tastelessness and philistinism—Lionel had natural good taste, and was fresh from Italy—of the furnished house she was then occupying, directly led to their taking, for a few months, the Chantry, by whose old-world charms Lionel had been attracted.

There was a certain amount of shooting attached to Sir John's domain. Lionel had caused a fine cartload of books to precede him at the Chantry, for, as fate seemed to be against his adopting the *rôle* of a celebrated traveller, he was now trying to make up his mind as to whether he should become a Shelley or a Byron, or merely one of the gentlemen who hewed and hacked them in the *Quarterly* or the *Edinburgh.* His mother's belief in his capacity to do or be anything he liked was not greater than his own; only she annoyed him because she made him absurd by showing it and talking about it.

A further argument for living in Basset was, that everybody there was to know there,

the Darbishers would know, through their introduction to the Latimers. On the whole, Lionel was disposed to think he might have a very tolerably enjoyable time; while, so excellent a training had he given his mother in unselfishness, that if he were happy—and safe—he could certainly conclude she would be happy too.

As soon as might be, and in duty bound, Mrs. Latimer put on her new spring pelisse and called at the Chantry. Mrs. Darbisher greeted her with the liveliest warmth and good-nature, and was so natural and amusing, Pollie quite enjoyed the visit. Darbisher himself did not come in till she was just going away. She liked his handsome, fresh-coloured, boyish face, and a certain simplicity and frankness that kept peeping up, as it were, through a rather grave, grand manner.

She fixed a day on the spot for the newcomers to dine at the Manor.

On the evening appointed, Lionel surveyed his mother with a sternly critical anxiety when she came down into the parlour equipped for the evening. The truth was, that Mrs. Darbisher's clothing always had an alarming appearance of being very

insecurely fastened on, and that at a dinner-party, a very few months earlier, her turban, ornamented with a bird of paradise, had actually fallen from her head among the dishes and silver on the table, revealing an extremely scanty grey coiffure. Lionel's rage and agony at this accident were quite pathetic, and were not at all lessened by the fact that his mother took it as an excellent joke.

He had spoken to her so severely about it that this evening she came into the room, with one hand at the turban, saying, "I assure you, Lionel, it's perfectly safe, for I can feel several of the pins actually running into my head."

Lionel replied, with great solemnity, that he was glad to hear it.

He was so very sensitive and priggish and young, that his mother would have laughed if she had dared; as it was, she only permitted herself a smile as she looked up at him rather deprecatingly, as they drove away together. He warned her on the brief drive —to be sure, it was quite necessary—of several things it would be much better if she did not say; and she replied, with a twinkle in her humorous eyes, and perhaps a shadow

in them too, that she really would try to remember.

One other guest had preceded them at the Manor, Dr. Spencer.

Lionel Darbisher said afterwards that Pollie's drawing-room set his teeth on edge. But Spencer, who also had taste, both natural and cultivated, liked it, while it amused him. That is, he had the sort of affection one does have for homely, ugly, familiar things—for the great drab carpet spread with magnolias; the wool covers Pollie's own busy hands had worked to preserve the magnificence of the satin and rosewood suite; the twin sofas, also wool-worked, on which one could by no means lie; the cabinet with the wax roses in it; and the marble mantelpiece, where a large Dresden china shepherd piped to a shepherdess over the head of a dainty alabaster lady, holding up an exquisitely wrought lace skirt, under a glass shade.

Occasionally—not often—when Spencer dined with the Latimers, he arrived ten minutes too early, and, while his host was engaged in the solemn business of getting up the wine, spent them with his hostess.

He would sit on the edge of one of those uncomfortable sofas, playing with Dim's silky

ear, while Pollie, almost lost in the depths of a great chair opposite, lifted her ardent face and talked to him—as one who has been living among strangers talks to a friend, refound. Spencer did not himself say much—what he said, he noticed she remembered and spoke of when they met again—but, reading his Browning long after, and recalling the soft glow and change—the wonder, life, eagerness in her face—he thought it was not only Evelyn Hope who was made of "spirit, fire and dew."

But politeness had not permitted him—or he had not permitted himself—to be more than ten minutes too soon, and the Darbishers came in and were introduced. The only other guest that evening was Peter Grant, who was late, and unconscious of it.

Some of the party certainly enjoyed themselves, but Lionel Darbisher was not one of them. Mrs. Darbisher had made Harry laugh consummately before he had finished ladling out the soup; and the fish was still on the table—soles at one end, turbot at the other—when Mrs. Darbisher was clearly heard by the whole company to say, "My son Li is very clever indeed, you know, Mr. Latimer—aren't you, Buppy?"

Now, to be called "Li," with its reflection on his veracity, was annoying to Lionel, but to be addressed by his baby-name "Buppy," with its offensive nearness to "puppy," was worse; while even a person neither vain nor young would have felt foolish at having his cleverness pointed out to a party of people who had obviously not noticed it.

He said, "Certainly not, ma'am!" with great indignation and a very hot face.

Mrs. Darbisher did not make matters better by adding that, *of course,* Li's was not the stupid sort of cleverness which passes examinations, and that he had, in fact, come down from Oxford without troubling much about them.

By this time, compassionate Pollie was really sorry for the unhappy youth, in his resplendent waistcoat and fashionable black satin stock; Spencer, who was peculiarly intolerant of silly women, felt contemptuous of the mother; Parson Grant noticed nothing; Harry, enjoying himself vastly, was taking wine with Mrs. Darbisher, and leading her on to fresh witticisms and enormities; and the unhappiest of the party was that humorous lady herself, who was acutely conscious of her son's disapproval, and egged on

by it to desperation and a yet more reckless use of her gift of making other people laugh.

When the women had gone into the drawing-room, and "the usual procession of bottles . . . with their Christian names in silver round their necks" went its way down the table, Spencer's soft heart, and recollections of his own youth perhaps, made him draw his chair to young Darbisher's, and pour a little oil and wine into the boy's wounds by talking to him as if he were ten years older than, to look at him, he possibly could be.

Darbisher was really going to be clever, and had not made his travels with his eyes shut; he was a sportsman, with something besides sport to talk about; and Spencer only smiled inwardly at the height and the breadth of his ambitions. For at two and twenty every man is going to conquer the world; five and thirty may well look back compassionately at such fine dreams. Besides, Spencer liked the boy's ingenuous face, and there was something rather touching in that youthful conceit.

Lionel quite began to enjoy himself presently, when he got hold of Parson Grant and poured defiantly into his old ear the objec-

tions to the miraculous which Lionel had obtained from his Scotch friend, and the Scotch friend from Mr. David Hume.

It would have taken a very outrageous scepticism to rouse Peter. He had no arguments to advance in favour of Balaam's ass really having spoken, or Joshua's sun really having stood still, except that he supposed they did, as the people who were there at the time said so. Then he filled his glass, sipped his port, and asked Lionel if the shooting prospects in the Chantry coverts were good.

In the drawing-room, Mrs. Darbisher had told Pollie all Lionel's history, from the time he was in long clothes, and had earnestly besought her advice (like all people who constantly ask advice, Mrs. Darbisher never took it) as to the best way of dealing with a son who scorned her behests and scolded her much more than she had ever dared to scold him.

Mrs. Darbisher's extreme volubility saved Pollie the useless trouble of giving any counsel. Just before talk and laughter in the hall, heralded the approach of the rest of the party, Mrs. Darbisher hurriedly said she had been regretting all the evening that Mr.

Latimer, pleasant as he was, was alive at all, as she distinctly saw that Pollie's was a character any woman would be thankful for in her son's wife.

Lionel was extremely severe and silent on the homeward drive; and when his mother said, apparently *àpropos* of nothing, but in fact in allusion to the turban, "I assure you, Buppy dear,—that is, Lionel—it didn't even wobble," and laughed a little, he received the remark with perfect disdain.

Mrs. Darbisher was awake the greater part of the night, admonishing herself as an old fool, and shedding a few tears over Lionel's undutifulness; while Lionel came down to breakfast, after a very good eight hours' sleep, a little less condemnatory, and aware that, though he found his mother annoying, he was fond of her.

It was rather unfortunate that his repentance took the form of accompanying her to the Basset shop the next morning, for, into that small, dark, sticky emporium, when Mrs. Darbisher was trying to think what she had come to buy, and Lionel, much bored, was looking at the boots, string and hams suspended from the ceiling, there entered two ladies.

Without a moment's warning, Mrs. Darbisher threw her arms round the elder of them, would have kissed her, only poke bonnets prevented, and said impulsively, "My dear—now, *are* you Mary Anne or Sophy? I *am* delighted to see you! And who ever would have thought of meeting you here!"

Lionel had become dreadfully used by now—that is, if any one could get used to such things—to his mother impulsively meeting and greeting dearest old friends, warmly asking them to stay with her, and then confessing she had quite forgotten their names. To the argument that one does not love a woman less because her name is, or is not, Jane or Matilda, Lionel listened with very scant patience, and said he did not care to have people invited to the house—it was not *his* house, but he seldom remembered that—whose very names were a mystery.

However, on this occasion, Miss Pilkington, for it was she, unravelled the knot by saying she was not Sophy or Mary Anne but Rachel, and by perfectly recollecting having met Mrs. Darbisher, then unmarried, staying at the house of a mutual and distant cousin, some five and twenty years earlier.

Miss Pilkington was a good deal flustered;

but to be connected with the Pilkingtons, however remotely, hall-marked any one in her eyes as solid silver. She forgave Mrs. Darbisher that undoubted flightiness of manner and appearance, and accepted her promiscuous invitations quite warmly.

Lionel was so annoyed with the whole proceedings that he continued to gaze pointedly, with a heightened colour in his face, at the boots and hams; and never once looked at Ann, modest and charming in the background. Nor did he particularly look at her when they were presently introduced, being entirely engrossed in his anxiety to get his mother away and prevent her from making herself—or was it from making him? —absurd. He was decidedly gruff as they walked home, and when Mrs. Darbisher rashly observed how *very* fond she had always been of Rachel Pilkington, could not help observing, "You seem to have got on very well without her for the last quarter of a century, ma'am."

Darbisher was not present when Miss Pilkington and Ann paid their duty call at the Chantry. Good-naturedly warned by Harry Latimer of the exceeding tedium of Miss Pilkington's tea-parties, he declined to

attend the first of those functions, and his mother went alone.

Old Mrs. Benet, meeting Ann one day—Ann was not sure that she *very* much liked Mrs. Benet—inquired if she knew the new young man up at the Chantry, and when Ann said she had only seen him once for two minutes, Mrs. Benet observed, "Well, that's a pity, that is; he ought to be in love with you by this time;" and Ann blushed, without looking foolish, as any one else would have done.

In due course, she and Miss Pilkington spent a May evening with the Darbishers; the two elders recalled old times in Lady Lucy's parlour, while Lionel took Ann round the rose-garden.

As his attention was not so much centred on himself this time, he perceived what a lovely little creature—she just reached Lionel's stalwart shoulder—Ann was. Before they left the parlour, she had drawn a book out of the shelf—had Pollie Latimer told her of Lionel's literary aspirations, or was it merely a bow she always drew at a venture?—and asked him if he were a great reader. As they strolled up and down the sundial path, Lionel was soon pouring into her ear some of his cleverest literary aspira-

tions and ideas; and found her calm silence and sympathy very soothing after his mother's commonplace, and often very commonsense, criticisms, beginning, "But Buppy dear," with which she brought his fine theories down, with a thud, from the realms of fancy to the hard and vulgar earth of fact.

When they were recalled to the parlour—by Mrs. Darbisher vaguely waving a parasol in their direction out of the glass-door—that lady's irresponsible tongue was wagging on merrily as usual, while what should have been a precise bow in her cap had come unstitched and was falling over her ample face in a streamer.

It was almost impossible for her son to help comparing mentally Miss Thornbery's composed neatness with the maternal untidiness. Perhaps Mrs. Darbisher—unwise people being often very sharp—detected the comparison, for when the visitors had gone, she looked attentively at Lionel, and sighed as she said, "A very dainty, sweet girl, I think, don't you, dear?"—and Lionel had the temerity to say that he had not noticed.

He was at some pains to account for his ready acceptance of Miss Pilkington's next invitation; having dubbed the first tea-party

entirely beneath the attention of his sex; and Mrs. Darbisher only just strangled in the utterance a rash remark on the extra smartness of Lionel's attire, as he and she started for that festivity.

Next, there came an expedition to Dilchester—in which Pollie, the chaperon, drove Ann into that town in the low phaeton, Latimer and Darbisher riding—with some shopping and a five o'clock dinner at "The Case is Altered" as goal.

Pollie had made up her mind as to Ann's character by this time—and kept her own counsel. Life had taught her nothing if not the perfect good nature and obstinacy of Harry's judgment of his friends, and she did not try to alter it. "A very pretty girl, and all you women are so deucedly jealous," would have been Harry's comment on any criticism of hers.

She was earnestly engaged on the drive in managing the cobs. Darbisher rode on Ann's side of the carriage, and said nothing in particular—or the nothings that mean everything. When they pulled up at "The Case is Altered," the wind had a little rumpled Pollie's curls, and the exertion of keeping the whip hand of the cobs had

heightened her colour, while Ann's fair braids, under a copious veil and bonnet, were as unruffled as herself.

As they were alighting, who should walk by but Mark Spencer, who had been to see a patient in the town. Hospitable Harry at once asked him to join their party at dinner.

Years afterwards, Spencer told the only confidant—or rather, the nearest approach to a confidant he ever had in the world—that at that dinner he perceived and knew, with the absolute certainty one does sometimes know entirely unprovable things, that Miss Ann had conveyed to young Darbisher the impression that he, Spencer, was her unsuccessful wooer; and that, therefore, Darbisher threw at Spencer, when he was not gazing enraptured and devoutly at Ann, looks of the greatest affront and indignation. The thought of them amused Mark Spencer, even after much lapse of time. Old Jane Benet, raising her keen eyes to his face for a minute, said, "I suppose Pollie Latimer wasn't silly enough to be taken in by that girl's nonsense?"—and Mark answered he thought Mrs. Latimer was not often taken in.

She, as well as her husband, and Mark too, somehow liked Lionel at that dinner for the

ardour and thoroughness of his mushroom passion. He was so hot and sincere and transparent in it, those would have been hard hearts indeed that did not desire to help it along.

After dinner, when the whole party walked to see the ruined monastery half a mile from the town, the three elders dropped considerately behind. As they talked, they were all conscious of Lionel's handsome head bending over his companion, as he poured into her small ear all his fine dreams and egotisms, and she listened in absorbed silence. Or was she not listening at all, but simply going on mentally arranging her modest wardrobe or finances? Anyhow, before they reached the ruins, Lionel was quoting poetry to her, and she was inquiring, with a *naïveté* any budding author must have found adorable, whether the lines were Lord Byron's or his own?

Of the three behind, Harry said—his vocabulary was not at all extensive—that Miss Thornbery was an uncommon pretty girl, wasn't she?

Mark replied he thought her face lacking in expression and change; and Harry asked what the deuce anybody wanted a face to

change for when it began by being as good-looking as that?

Pollie did not say much. Perhaps she recalled the days, not so very long ago, when she too was a girl—only not, of course, thought straightforward and clear-seeing Pollie, *half* such a pretty girl as Ann. Once, looking at the pair ahead, she caught her breath in a sigh, as if she envied them their dream. Spencer turned for a moment and looked at her; and Pollie drew out her watch, suspended round her neck on a long hair chain, and said practically they must hurry or they would be late getting home.

After that, there were many of "May's warm, slow, yellow, moonlit summer nights," when that excellently good-natured Harry insisted on having young Darbisher to dinner, and Miss Ann to meet him; and after dinner, made short work of the solemn conventions of the day which decreed that it was at once unwholesome and improper to walk in the garden in the evening.

When Ann was due to drink evening tea at the Manor—one drank tea in those days, and did not merely have it—Harry acquainted Darbisher, and he dropped in—by accident.

That *naïf* young gentleman was always making excuses to buy things at the shop he had despised, in the hope, not disappointed, of meeting Ann; or hanging about the Benets' gate, exchanging the time of day with the old Doctor, with one eye and all his attention on the White Cottage.

He scowled indignantly now not only at Spencer, but at Parson Grant; and Spencer realized—old Peter of course observed nothing—that Ann had somehow managed to translate her one brief visit to the Rectory into a declaration of, at least, admiration on the part of the Rector.

Boxes of resplendent raiment arrived from London, and the same vanity which, a little while ago, had given Lionel every satisfaction in his appearance, now made him agonizingly diffident concerning it. Having severely abstained from church-going for the express pleasure of shocking the church-goers, he now began to exercise the greatest ingenuity in timing his arrival and departure from that building to coincide exactly with Miss Pilkington's and her niece's. At home, he spent hours locked in his sitting-room composing verses—verses which were just good enough to make one confidently hope that their writer

would soon see how bad they were, and take to some other pursuit. Lionel had, indeed, his complaint very thoroughly; all the usual symptoms; and the rash very fully out.

Meanwhile, nobody, or hardly anybody, had even thought of Mrs. Darbisher.

That vague, sharp, roving eye of hers had soon detected that the heart her boy wanted was a cold and shallow little heart; that the great sorrows and joys of life would leave Ann unmoved and impervious. Once, in early days, when there was still time, she did venture to suggest to Lionel that she did not think Miss Thornbery had much feeling; but Lionel's wrath caused her hurriedly and foolishly to eat her words. What, after all, wise and resolute people have to do she, too, found herself doing—helplessly looking on; or, what was worse, sitting at home, when Lionel was out, fancying what she did not see. She was not sufficiently machiavellian to invite Ann to the Chantry, morning, noon and night, and surfeit Lionel with her prettiness and her sameness; and she was not bold enough — or silly enough — to thwart him and object to Ann plainly and openly.

One afternoon, Mrs. Latimer, coming to call, found her with traces of the unbecoming tears of real grief on her face, her shawl slipping from her shoulders, and capstrings floating with a vague melancholy. She did not conceal the tears, or directly allude to them; but presently she asked Pollie what she thought of Ann's character.

Pollie tried to be consolatory, but she was too honest to convey the impression that she liked Ann very particularly. A gleam of humour came into Mrs. Darbisher's wet and wandering eye, and she said how much she wished Mr. Grant or Dr. Spencer had proved —more susceptible. Pollie did not respond to this aspiration; she only said, in her downright, practical way—

"But, as you say, Mrs. Darbisher, your son is entirely dependent on you, he cannot marry without your consent;" and Julia Darbisher, looking absently round for her handkerchief to remove the last tear, replied—

"Ah! but then, my dear, he can make me give it."

Of course, that proved to be the case.

Only two or three evenings later, Lionel, who had been out, unaccounted for, all day,

came into Lady Lucy's parlour about nine o'clock, bringing his news which was no news. Mrs. Darbisher was putting a few stitches, absently, in some needlework; she hated needlework, but as it was then *de rigueur* for all women to do it, she was in the habit of continually beginning pieces of embroidery, and leaving them about the room, half finished, with the point of the needle uppermost to catch the unwary. The candles were not lit, but it was still light enough for her to see Lionel's face, and before he had uttered three sentences, she got up—with reels of silk, scissors and thimbles, rolling off her lap on to the floor—and kissed her boy with her usual injudicious warmth.

To-night, however, he magnanimously overlooked the remarkable angle at which the embrace set her turban, and a certain dampness on her cheeks, and was soon pacing up and down the room, eagerly enumerating all Ann's virtues, and every now and then, quite unconsciously, stooping to pick up some of the needlework appliances on the floor. He finished by saying that Everybody—everybody, that convenient generality which, as often as not, means nobody—Everybody says it is a good thing to marry young, and it will

be so nice for you to have a daughter to look after you and help you.

At this juncture, Mrs. Darbisher was feeling about vaguely, and with difficulty for she was not slim, for the scissors under her chair, and her answer was not audible. She did not, indeed, say very much till the candles had been brought, and Lionel's excitement had subsided sufficiently to let him sit down and merely relieve his feelings by rapidly moving about, as he talked, the pens and trays on the writing-table. His real good self was touched not a little—and his conceit and the selfishness of the most blissfully selfish of all human conditions dropped from him for a moment—when he and his mother came to discuss money matters, and she proposed, not with her usual impulsiveness, but as one who had counted the cost, to make over to the young couple the half of her kingdom—the half being about five hundred a year. Lionel's gratitude for that liberality—afterwards slightly curbed by solicitors—was spoilt for her when she stated that she would not live with him and Ann, and she saw that he was grateful for that too.

Before they went to bed—very late—Lionel was again dilating on Ann's charms

tions and ideas; and found her calm silence and sympathy very soothing after his mother's commonplace, and often very commonsense, criticisms, beginning, "But Buppy dear," with which she brought his fine theories down, with a thud, from the realms of fancy to the hard and vulgar earth of fact.

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She, as well as her husband, and Mark too, somehow liked Lionel at that dinner for the

ardour and thoroughness of his mushroom passion. He was so hot and sincere and transparent in it, those would have been hard hearts indeed that did not desire to help it along.

After dinner, when the whole party walked to see the ruined monastery half a mile from the town, the three elders dropped considerately behind. As they talked, they were all conscious of Lionel's handsome head bending over his companion, as he poured into her small ear all his fine dreams and egotisms, and she listened in absorbed silence. Or was she not listening at all, but simply going on mentally arranging her modest wardrobe or finances? Anyhow, before they reached the ruins, Lionel was quoting poetry to her, and she was inquiring, with a *naïveté* any budding author must have found adorable, whether the lines were Lord Byron's or his own?

Of the three behind, Harry said—his vocabulary was not at all extensive—that Miss Thornbery was an uncommon pretty girl, wasn't she?

Mark replied he thought her face lacking in expression and change; and Harry asked what the deuce anybody wanted a face to

decent pink shirt, and listening attentively to a shell.

The Doctor and Maggie were both called into the clammy closeness of the parlour to inspect this offering. Maggie said, "Lor!" and declared herself that glad *she* was not going to have the dusting of it.

"Very unique indeed, Jeannie, I should say —very unique," was the Doctor's observation; and seeing the word "Miranda" at the lady's base, he added that it had escaped him for the moment who Miranda was.

"That's for *them* to find out," said Mrs. Benet firmly, as if she were setting the bridal pair a conundrum.

Miss Pilkington of course gave Ann everything Sarah would allow her to part with. The Thornbery brothers and sisters sent small home-made offerings, and Rachel wondered a little if Ann quite remembered the self-denial and labour those poor presents cost.

Eliza of Dilchester, who, with other faults, had the Pilkington failing of excessive generosity, contributed five pounds towards the trousseau. That Ann made the very best use of the very little money she had to devote to this end, is as certain as that little Miss Fitten grew more thin, nervous and anæmic than ever

in the strain of carrying out her ideas. Mrs. Latimer lent most of her garments as patterns. Mrs. Darbisher offered Ann half the silks and shawls in a wardrobe kept in a condition Ann rightly thought deplorable; just as she was always trying to make over to Lionel the family silver, then in a London bank.

He declined to take that present, saying, "We certainly shan't consent to rob my mother any further, shall we, Ann?"—and Ann said, "Of *course* not," with a pretty emphasis which did not prevent the idea occurring to Mrs. Darbisher's mind that Ann privately thought a little contemptuously of her for offering so much, and of Lionel for not accepting it.

To be sure, his mother would have cut off her head and given it to him readily enough, only she knew he would think the gift empty and worthless.

A dreadful restlessness consumed her in these days. She was ashamed of the maternal jealousy—if, indeed, jealousy it was that made it painful to her to see Lionel and Ann wandering, absorbed in each other, in the rose garden. To escape them and the feeling, she paid calls in Basset at all sorts of unconventional hours—always absently leaving

in her train, a glove, a parasol, or a scarf—and was everywhere more irresponsibly amusing than ever. Harry Latimer, who was wont to beat a hasty retreat before the advance of callers, left special instructions with the parlourmaid that he was to be sought till found whenever Mrs. Darbisher arrived. If her humour at this time constantly outran her discretion, in a manner which would have earned Lionel's sternest filial disapproval, at least not a word ever tripped off her tongue in criticism of her son's choice; while that torrent of liveliness would naturally be taken as a proof she rejoiced in it.

Mrs. Latimer, holding her hand to say good-bye after one of these visits, was suddenly struck with the idea that she had grown much thinner than when she first came to Basset, and that her eyes had a sleepless look. She said so, in her candid fashion; and at once felt that Mrs. Darbisher was not pleased at her perspicacity.

Harry came in at that moment.

It had just been decided that, owing to the minute size of the White Cottage, Ann was to be married from the Manor, and that a week before the wedding Mrs. Latimer was to give a festal wedding dinner-party.

CHAPTER VIII

SIR JOHN

It was now some four and twenty years since Peter Grant had been clapped on the back by his young cousin, John Railton, and offered the Church as a career.

When John's mother, Lady Lucy, died, the boy was left to a father, not of evil life, but of evil temper, who, himself a spoilt child, was determined his son should not be. A long course of petty tyranny and bullying something soured John's nature and embittered his view of life, but it at least made him neither liar nor slave.

Once at Oxford, and in independent possession of his mother's small fortune, he of course misused the liberty and money which he had never been taught to use. His wildness was far more thorough and extensive than Peter Grant's, for Jack's mind was not "a little balanced with stupidity," as Peter's had been. Jack's tandem was one of the sights of the University—tandems were not

a forbidden joy there until 1836. He might have said with Edgar, "Wine loved I deeply, dice dearly." There was not a prize-fight or a cock-fight within miles at which one might not have seen Jack's lean, handsome, and rather sinister young face. As to head-work, he had plenty of brains, and passed the absolutely necessary examinations without much trouble.

Before he came down from Oxford the old Baronet was dead—an event at which John neither felt nor feigned any particular sorrow.

Young Sir John, now a wealthy man, came up to town, and there amused himself with, and as, the other young bloods of the day. Once, at least, he figured with a couple of friends at Bow Street, charged with wrenching knockers off street doors, and assaulting the police. Then he paid a fine for maliciously upsetting a shell-fish stall; did it again, and paid the fine, doubled. One had to be young, and young in the epoch when the obvious and elementary practical joke appealed to almost everybody as wit, to extract from it the uproarious mirth John and his friends certainly extracted. Soon the young baronet was much heard of at

Newmarket and Brooks', and the dingy green-room of a certain theatre. The green-room was the antechamber to a noisy and brief *esclandre* of a sentimental character.

Sir John went abroad, travelled, sobered; returned home, taking a fitful interest in politics and literature, breakfasted now and again with Rogers or at Holland House; dropped the green-room, and resumed gambling and racing, more temperately.

His own natural good parts made him acceptable in the society of people distinguished in mind or achievement; only he himself remained always *dilettante,* achieving nothing. Was it that ample means made him lazy, or that the cynicism in his nature caused him to doubt the value of the success he saw his compeers sacrificing ease, and sometimes honour, to achieve? He would sit in the midst of a clever company, able to hold his own in the conversation, and by no means always troubling to hold it—a long, rather distinguished figure, carelessly well dressed, with the curl on his lips, and something steadfast and pleasant in the eyes. It was said by those of his friends who had tested it, that his generosity was great; and there was a kind of softness and reverence far away

down in his heart which, perhaps, the memory of his mother kept there, and which was, in fact, a part of his inheritance from her. He had agreeable, shabby, bachelor quarters in town; a terrible family mansion in Norfolk, and the Chantry, Basset.

In those days, *noblesse* rarely obliged the young noble to do anything but amuse himself; and the very class which most suffered from his negligence, seems most to have admired the splash and dash, the extravagance and magnificence which kept their lord from mending their broken fences, and rebuilding their tumbling cottages. The villagers in Basset, at least, quite enjoyed in Sir John's youth the highly coloured stories of his losses at play, and his recklessness on the turf; and when he came to the Chantry with his horses, his man cook from London, his foreign valet, and his air of the great world, they were quite grateful to him for dissipating the worst evil of the country village—dullness.

By the time he was forty he had become a far more conscientious landowner; and though his visits to Basset were very short, they were more frequent, and had business as an object.

On the day before the Manor was to give the wedding dinner-party, Parson Grant actually had a letter which was not from Maria, now his sole correspondent, and found by a hasty scrawl on a vast sheet of paper—written in the immense hurry of the person who has nothing definite to do—that Sir John proposed, as the Chantry was let, damn it, to descend that very day upon the hospitality of the Rector and the Rectory; that cursed Phillips—who was Sir John's agent as well as the Latimers'—requesting the Baronet's presence to see to some of his outlying properties. Sir John never spared Peter's cloth either in speech or writing; after all, he had, so to speak, himself cut out that cloth for Peter's wear; besides, Peter must be used to strong language—"our armies swore terribly in Flanders."

A postscript announced, "Have not forgotten your cook—am bringing Adolphe;" which meant that Sir John, on his last visit to the Rectory, had suffered so grievously at the hands of the Rectory factotum, that this time he purposed to be accompanied by his own—a perfectly clever, adaptable, dishonest, good-natured foreigner—of no distinct nation-

ality—able to talk, rather ill, any language, and to cook, admirably well, any food.

Peter timidly announced to his household that Sir John was to be expected that evening; himself assisted to prepare the guest chamber, by moving the lumber and boxes it contained into a corner; and, meeting Pollie, surprised and surpassed himself by having the readiness and aplomb to ask if he might bring Sir John to the dinner-party on the morrow.

The dinner-hour was fashionably late at six, when it was still broad daylight, and there was no need of the tall, best wax candles in the great silver candelabra.

Sir John, sitting with his hostess on one side—he liked Pollie for her charm of perfect naturalness, and respected her for the excellence of her dinners—and Mrs. Darbisher on the other, was fully, if idly, engaged in listening to the sallies of the amazing, amusing old woman to whom he found he had let the Chantry; so that, even if her turban had not obscured his view, he would scarcely have noticed the heroine of the evening.

After the dessert and the wine, he and Peter adjourned to the garden, and smoked a few of the cigarettes with which the pockets

of Peter's shameful old coat were always stuffed. Then Peter, who had made, simply and obviously, a large collection of good things from dessert for Tommy, went upstairs to present them to that youth—doing his best to keep awake in bed.

As Sir John strolled to the drawing-room, he heard the sound of the harp, and entered softly.

Though it was still daylight without, the great velvet curtains had been drawn—Mrs. Latimer having worked their borders of roses and tulips, at immense expense of labour, on purpose to be seen on festal occasions. Against their rich, dark background, just under the glow of a chandelier full of candles, Ann Thornbery sat at the old harp belonging to the Pilkingtons, drawing her fingers across the strings, in the preliminary bars of a song.

Very few people realize how great advantage beauty receives from dress and fashion—how much the jewel owes to its setting. But there are rare occasions when artlessness is the highest art. It would have been considered little short of improper if Ann had prematurely arrayed herself in one of her new trousseau frocks, so she was dressed in

the soft old muslin that clung to her slight figure, and added to its exquisite air of virginity and youth.

With her fair hair parted softly, Madonna-wise, on her forehead, with the "white wonder" of the hand on the harp-strings, with her head a little raised, and her lovely, clear eyes looking up, she might have stood as model to a painter of a "young-eyed cherubin" harping in Heaven. When she sang "Angels ever bright and fair," in a voice not fine or rich, but as clear and fresh as dawn, and with round limpid notes in it like a boy's, the resemblance was complete.

Sir John, having closed the door, leant against the jamb, and, with his own face in shadow, watched the singer's.

When she had finished, there was a silence —the best of thanks. Old Rastrick, who of course was of the party, retrieved Mrs. Darbisher's handkerchief from under a chair, and she mopped up a large tear without concealment—Lionel considering it correct and becoming that women should cry at sentiment. Mrs. Benet had been so intent in listening that she had quite forgotten to cover the stain in her front breadth with her ample arm; and

her old man had, momentarily, ceased to regret his carpet-slippers and his home-evening.

Rachel's kind, good face looked as if it were in church; but a comfortable, human satisfaction in such a creditable niece, showed on it, when the room broke into applause and admiration. Adoring Lionel, who had been sitting with his back to the company, worshipping Ann, went to help her to repair a very slight accident to a harp-string; Pollie said, "*Please* sing us something else"; Harry, whom "Angels" had also moved, added, "Several things"; and Sir John, still leaning against the door with his face in shadow, said nothing at all.

It was not until Ann had given, at Lionel's suggestion, "Fly away, pretty moth," and come down from heaven to be a most coy and lovely woman—one could be coy in the forties without being ridiculous—that he moved from his place, came across to her, introduced himself in a few easy words, and stood chatting for a time to her and to Lionel.

Lionel naturally desired to walk home with Miss Pilkington and Ann (who had, of course, been duly and technically "fetched"

by Sarah), but was so charmed with Ann's thoughtfulness when she softly commanded him to go with his mother (who was to lose him so soon!) that he obeyed, good-naturedly.

So it turned out that it was Sir John and Peter Grant who escorted the ladies of the White Cottage to their door—Sarah, carrying the party slippers, being sent on ahead. Grant, who liked Miss Pilkington, and was quite unconscious of any criticism in her mind of himself, went on in front with her in his usual silence; and Ann, who had an adorable little hood framing her face, walked behind with Sir John.

Before the occupants of the White Cottage went to bed, Sarah, who, though disagreeable, was familiar, had of course to hear all about the dinner—that is, all she had not heard already from the Manor cook.

She inquired if Mrs. Latimer wore her puce or the (turned) blue, and if Miss Ann liked the Baronite? Ann said it was the turned blue, which she did *not* consider very becoming, and that she thought Sir John was a dear old gentleman.

"The dear old gentleman" and his host sat up, both smoking, for an hour in Peter's study. Sir John asked a few questions about

the only people he did not already know well in Basset—the Darbishers and Miss Thornbery. Peter's answers were not less vague and unsatisfactory than usual.

When Sir John went up to bed, contrary to his usual custom he roused the sleeping Adolphe, and gave him a few orders.

The day after the dinner-party, Miss Pilkington retired to bed, suffering from what she called an "obstruction on the chest, caused by the night air." When Dr. Benet arrived and said simply, that the obstruction was lower down than the chest, and was occasioned by the rich food at the dinner-party, Rachel naturally attributed the opinion to the Doctor's lack of breeding, and actually told Ann that she did sometimes wish she could be bold enough to employ Dr. Spencer on her own account, as one could see at a glance *he* was a thorough gentleman.

Ann agreed gently, but a little indifferently.

As Dr. Benet left the house, after his second professional visit to Miss Pilkington, he beheld the voluble and good-looking Adolphe conversing with grim Sarah at the back door; and wondered if that agreeable foreigner could possibly be courting the

stern virgin who ruled the mistress of the White Cottage.

Later that same day, Pollie, coming to the Cottage with new-laid eggs and inquiries, beheld on her way there, disappearing down the lane near the Rectory, two figures. Lionel Darbisher she had just met, riding into Dilchester. The only other lean, tall men in the neighbourhood of Basset were Sir John Railton and Dr. Mark Spencer. Pollie had half thought for a moment Ann's companion was Spencer; but as she passed Myrtle Cottage, there was his dark head by the scarlet geranium. There was something puzzled about the bright face she put into Miss Pilkington's bed-curtains, as she asked after that lady's health. Among other things, Miss Pilkington informed her that Ann was taking a little walk with Lionel, unchaperoned she feared, but how, the chaperon being ill, was this enormity to be avoided? "When you doubt, abstain;" is an uncommonly sound rule to apply to speech. Pollie, feeling deceitful, kept her own counsel, and walked home thoughtfully.

This was Friday—the wedding was to be the following Wednesday.

On Saturday, Ann spent the afternoon at

the Chantry, and as she sat in the parlour with Lionel and Mrs. Darbisher, unpacking a wedding present, Sir John came to pay his respects to his tenant. It struck that lady that her landlord did not look so old as she had supposed him to be when they met at the Latimers'. He had a vigorous, determined look on his face to-day; was it that a kind of ardour and deviltry which had been in his eyes as extinct fire was alive again? Certainly the sarcastic mouth softened a little as he looked round the parlour where a small John had stood by his mother's side, pricking a text on to paper with a pin, or flattening a button of a nose—it had grown drooping and Jewish looking since—against the window pane, watching the summer rain on the roses. Ann was sitting in his mother's chair by the writing-table, with her bonnet hanging on her arm by its blue ribbons, and her lovely face bent over the present. Sir John came to admire it too—and Mrs. Darbisher saw it was the face only on which his eyes were fixed.

Lionel's mare was led round to the gravel walk outside the long windows—there were papers in Mr. Rastrick's office awaiting his signature—and Ann put down the parcel and,

with the bonnet still on her arm, went out to see him mount. To be afraid of everything was one of the accepted charms of the young woman of the day, and Ann, whose admirable nerves and perfect health had given her really an excellent courage, put out a very timid little hand to pat the mare with the smallest and most gingerly of pats. Lionel stooped to say something in farewell, which Mrs. Darbisher and Sir John, standing by the window, did not hear. He rode away—handsome, happy, and often looking back.

It was only natural that when Ann rose to leave, saying she was dreadfully busy and of course did not like to be away from Aunt Rachel for long, Sir John should offer to take her home. Mrs. Darbisher, in spite of her flimsy satin slippers, came to the extreme limit of the Chantry grounds with her guests, and stood at the gate looking after them until they had quite disappeared from view.

When Lionel returned from Dilchester, he found his mother refreshingly and extraordinarily silent. He naturally attributed this to her distress at the prospect of losing him, and wasted a long time assuring her, really heartily and warmly, that Ann and he

should be always staying with her or she with them, and that the parting would be only nominal. She returned quite absent and brief replies, and scarcely seemed to hear him.

On Sunday, Sir John accompanied his host to church in the morning; sat in the Railton family pew; looked about him a good deal and yawned. He announced to Peter his intention of staying at home in the afternoon, candidly stating that two such sermons in one day were more than he could bear. Old Peter, who, unless he had been under marching orders on Sundays, would very likely not have attended any service himself, was not in the least offended.

In those days, if people went to church once they went twice, and the afternoon service at Basset was as well, or ill, attended as the morning. On that particular Sunday, however, Ann and Sarah were both absentees —owing to Miss Pilkington's illness.

Peter Grant certainly could not complain that either on week-days or Sundays his guest was a troublesome one.

Sir John was out all day, generally on his horse, which he had brought with him—presumably inspecting his farms and property with Phillips. Sometimes, he would stroll

out again in the evening, in the warm June dusk. In fact, his only defect as a visitor was that he gave no hint when his visit was likely to end. That it would last over the wedding was certain. He had sent for his phaeton and cobs, which presaged an even longer stay. Peter had always liked his cousin, and this time, despite Sir John's saturnine face and sarcastic utterance, there was surely in him something of the eagerness and spirit which had marked the boy. Adolphe always made himself popular in a kitchen by the simple system of making ardent love to the oldest and ugliest woman in it; and when he was not thus engaged, seemed fully occupied in running errands for the household, or his master, in the village and even in Dilchester.

Peter's post-bag was quite heavy and fat now Sir John was his guest. Once, at least, a thick legal document arrived, which the Baronet received as if he had expected it, and to which he made no allusion. But a certain satisfaction on his guest's face suggested to Peter that Sir John had been successfully raising money.

Meanwhile, the village was quite enjoying the wedding preparations. The dame school

was to have a holiday for the great occasion; and there was talk of erecting such a triumphal arch as had welcomed home Harry and Pollie. Mrs. Muggleton, the dingy pew-opener, made, on Tuesday, a feint of giving the church an extra clean. The custom of decorating it with flowers was yet unknown; but Pollie, with some exercise of tact and skill, succeeded in abstracting Peter's old surplice from the vestry, and had it washed and mended.

At the Manor, for hours together for several days before the great occasion, she and Mrs. Jones bent their very dissimilar heads together over Mrs. Glasse, and evolved from those heads and her instructions the loveliest pies and jellies.

Harry, in the library, made a few efforts to compose a speech, suitably parental in character, for the breakfast (he was to act in *loco parentis,* and give the bride away), soon decided to trust to the inspiration of the moment and his usual excellent luck; whistled to the dogs, and went out to despatch a cart and a strong horse into Dilchester to meet cases of wine, specially ordered from London.

Mrs. Benet, now knowing Mark's wardrobe

by heart, and regarding all tailors as sharks preying on foolish man, herself made him a new wedding waistcoat—several sizes too large, so that he could grow stout with impunity.

At the Chantry there was naturally much business and preparation.

With a solemn omniscience, Lionel had actually settled on a suitable wedding costume for his mother; and especially begged her to keep the lace shawl which completed it in place, and by no means to allow it, as had once happened, to catch in the chain round her neck and hang suspended by a single thread down her back, like a flag at half-mast on a still day. He further issued minutely careful instructions as to her conduct at the breakfast; but his personal condition of triumphant bliss made him, on the whole, less strict with her than usual, and he forgave her her anxious eyes and frequent lapses into tears, as natural though unnecessary.

She remained, for her, curiously silent. She seemed to be always on the point of saying things, and then stopping short. Lionel must have detected such repression, as being extremely foreign to her character, but that

he was totally absorbed in himself, Ann, and happiness.

Meanwhile, at the White Cottage, Miss Pilkington was daily making herself worse by the fear she should not be better in time for the important day. On Monday, it became evident that anticipation had indeed brought about realization; and she shed many tears of disappointment, while Ann softly bathed her head with eau-de-Cologne.

Ann was the most gentle and soothing of nurses, totally without the bang and bounce which distinguish her descendants to-day; and, instead of their loud-voiced health and cheerfulness—all very well if one is one's self healthy and cheerful—had the quiet and repose which were once taken to be excellent things in woman. When Rachel opened her aching eyes, there, on the chair by the window, was her niece, with the fair smooth head bent over the voluminous trousseau pocket handkerchief, which she was embroidering with her Christian name—it was unlucky to put the surname till it was really one's own—and the invalid shut her eyes again with a contented sigh, as if she had seen something refreshing and healing.

Of course, Ann was not always in the sick-

room. It was Sarah who pointed out that Miss had a deal to do a-sorting and a-packing of her things for London—the honeymoon was to be spent there. But, all the same, Ann was unselfishly ready to run little errands for her aunt—to fetch the beautiful beef-tea Mrs. Latimer was having made for her—or to leave a message at Dr. Benet's to say the precise hour at which the patient would next wish to see him. The solemn rule, that the well-bred young lady must never be allowed out-of-doors unattended, had, perforce, to be more and more relaxed in Ann's case; but she was so perfectly modest and decorous and, withal, was to be married so soon, that even Miss Pilkington was comfortably resigned to the inevitable.

On the evening before the wedding Ann brought in the little, white, low-necked bridal frock to show it to her aunt in its full beauty and completion; and tried on the bonnet, with its white satin ribbons, and the lace pelerine in which she was to "go away."

She was naturally pleased to give that little dress-rehearsal; and so gently attentive presently in herself bringing upstairs her aunt's mild supper of bread and milk, that Rachel felt, with a new, sudden stab at her

heart, how much she would miss her pretty companion.

Presently, from the bed, as in duty bound, the aunt tendered a little last, good, kindly advice on the right conduct of a wife—and felt herself suddenly pulled up against the blank wall of Ann's quiet self-satisfaction, which made her gently and absolutely certain of being perfect in every relation of life. When they said good night, the old spinster was almost ashamed, in the face of the bride's exquisite calm, of her own warm, agitated feelings and emotions.

The wedding-day—it was the 1st of July—dawned fine and hot.

Before half-past ten—the service was to be at eleven—Basset church presented an appearance of very uncommon animation. Carriages had begun to arrive from Dilchester; great barouches brought a sprinkling of the County. The free benches and the music-gallery were crowded with villagers; the school children, ready to scatter flowers, were drawn up in line outside. In the vestry, Parson Grant and Rover were dejectedly waiting the appointed hour—the Parson, having being greatly warned against being behind time, was much before it, and

clad a good half-hour too soon in his clean surplice; while Rover lay at full length, with his head between his paws, looking attentively at his master and inquiring with his eyes how much longer this sort of thing was to go on.

Eliza Pilkington, the bride's nearest relation present, was in the Manor pew with Mrs. Latimer.

Pollie had on a new gown and a blonde scarf; and at her side, Tommy, in a beautiful little nankeen suit and frilled collar, was literally and metaphorically on the tiptoe of excitement, mounted on two hassocks, and prepared to enjoy his first wedding to the full.

Mrs. Darbisher, accompanied by her brother-in-law, who was staying at the Chantry, had, thought observant Pollie, a thin, distraught look.

Mrs. Benet was magnificent in her new bonnet; a thick, handsome lace veil over her face, first worn at her own marriage, did not prevent her shrewd old eyes from seeing everybody and everything. The Doctor was there—reluctantly—but trying, not unsuccessfully, to put a good face on the matter and appear genial and hearty.

Mark Spencer was, so far, absent; and Sir

John's family pew was being rigorously preserved for him by Mrs. Muggleton. Old Finch had contrived to drag his gouty foot into the farm seat. Miss Fitten, tremblingly anxious to see the results of her handiwork, had a good place near him. Those who had tears were preparing to shed them now. Mrs. Rastrick was not likely to miss so happy an opportunity of being miserable. Mr. Rastrick, detained by business, drove up at the last minute—that is to say, about ten minutes to eleven—and prayed briefly into the lining of a brand-new white beaver hat.

Hovering about the aisle were Lionel and his best man, Chisholm, the young Scotsman, who had already thought better of free thinking. Lionel was anxiously wondering if any one would notice the slight imperfection of fit in the back of his fine new blue swallow-tail, or if he had only imagined that defect; then, impatiently, wished the whole business were over, and he and Ann were off—to Elysium.

It had been arranged that Harry Latimer, in his parental character, was to drive in the best yellow landeau to the White Cottage and call for Ann.

The landeau was heard to rumble past the

church, pull up at the White Cottage, wait there, and, after a rather long interval, drive to the church again. The clock struck eleven. There were the usual stirrings and whisperings of excitement, and every one was looking towards the door, Mrs. Latimer's brisk little head being also turned in that direction.

Suddenly, she saw her husband come in—alone, walking quickly, and with a most portentous expression on his ruddy face. In his hand there was a letter, beautifully directed in a sloping feminine handwriting to Lionel Darbisher, Esquire.

Making straight for Lionel, as Harry passed his own pew he breathed in his wife's ear the momentous and laconic statement, "Bolted with Railton!"

CHAPTER IX

MY LADY

THE action of Sir John's most widely criticized, was all the same one of the most generous and genuine of his life. To be capable of being wholly enthralled by a woman implies, surely, a faith in human nature, a sincerity of devotion, and an unworldliness which are not ignoble traits.

For the arts and cajoleries of accomplished and designing beauty, Sir John was, by much experience, perfectly a match; but when he saw Ann—with the innocence which recalled his mother—a violet—

> "dim,
> But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
> Or Cytherea's breath,"

he fell in love with her with the rapture of a boy, and believed that he worshipped an angel. To rescue her from a marriage she was soon brought to avow loveless; to woo her, but never to sear or frighten her,

with the ardour of his sudden, leaping passion; to deceive a few old women and bribe a couple of servants, needed determination and some shrewdness, but not much time.

As for Ann, when she first saw Sir John, it naturally occurred to her as a pity that she had met him too late; her instincts soon told her that it might not be too late after all. Then she really did nothing but be lovely and a little pathetic; meet Sir John, by chance, as often as possible; and when the meetings were no longer by chance, modestly and gently facilitate them.

Lionel, whom she had really liked very well indeed, she almost forgot.

The shortness of the time and the difficulties of the chase, made Sir John the more hot to engage in it. Was it Ann or himself who had suggested the special license, the marriage in Dilchester on the morning of July 1st—since it could not possibly be arranged sooner—the cobs and phaeton waiting to drive the pair at once on the first stage of their honeymoon journey?

At the time, Sir John certainly thought it was he who had arranged everything.

After Ann had kissed her aunt good night on that last evening of June, she had written

two letters, one to Rachel and one to Lionel, saying all the usual things in quite the nicest way. In Rachel's letter, she had not forgotten to thank her aunt for all her kindness, to apologize for the trouble she was giving, and to add that marrying Sir John would be such a much better thing for poor papa and mama and the brothers and sisters at home!

In the letter to Lionel was that well-worn, but very just and good excuse, about the feelings of one's heart being beyond one's control; and he was not spared the supreme *banalité*—Ann would henceforth regard him as a brother.

She pinned these two notes on her pin-cushion in the accepted manner. She put away the white bridal frock, honestly regretful she could not wear it. Since the perfectly reliable Sarah had been instructed to call her in excellent time to elope comfortably, Ann slept all night—a sound, soft sleep like a baby's. In the morning, she rose as fresh as a flower, put on the going-away frock, the pelerine, the bonnet with white ribbons, saw that the two notes were secure on the pin-cushion, left her little room in neatest order, said " Good-bye, Sarah, and thank you

by heart, and regarding all tailors as sharks preying on foolish man, herself made him a new wedding waistcoat—several sizes too large, so that he could grow stout with impunity.

At the Chantry there was naturally much business and preparation.

With a solemn omniscience, Lionel had actually settled on a suitable wedding costume for his mother; and especially begged her to keep the lace shawl which completed it in place, and by no means to allow it, as had once happened, to catch in the chain round her neck and hang suspended by a single thread down her back, like a flag at half-mast on a still day. He further issued minutely careful instructions as to her conduct at the breakfast; but his personal condition of triumphant bliss made him, on the whole, less strict with her than usual, and he forgave her her anxious eyes and frequent lapses into tears, as natural though unnecessary.

She remained, for her, curiously silent. She seemed to be always on the point of saying things, and then stopping short. Lionel must have detected such repression, as being extremely foreign to her character, but that

he was totally absorbed in himself, Ann, and happiness.

Meanwhile, at the White Cottage, Miss Pilkington was daily making herself worse by the fear she should not be better in time for the important day. On Monday, it became evident that anticipation had indeed brought about realization; and she shed many tears of disappointment, while Ann softly bathed her head with eau-de-Cologne.

Ann was the most gentle and soothing of nurses, totally without the bang and bounce which distinguish her descendants to-day; and, instead of their loud-voiced health and cheerfulness—all very well if one is one's self healthy and cheerful—had the quiet and repose which were once taken to be excellent things in woman. When Rachel opened her aching eyes, there, on the chair by the window, was her niece, with the fair smooth head bent over the voluminous trousseau pocket handkerchief, which she was embroidering with her Christian name—it was unlucky to put the surname till it was really one's own—and the invalid shut her eyes again with a contented sigh, as if she had seen something refreshing and healing.

Of course, Ann was not always in the sick-

room. It was Sarah who pointed out that Miss had a deal to do a-sorting and a-packing of her things for London—the honeymoon was to be spent there. But, all the same, Ann was unselfishly ready to run little errands for her aunt—to fetch the beautiful beef-tea Mrs. Latimer was having made for her—or to leave a message at Dr. Benet's to say the precise hour at which the patient would next wish to see him. The solemn rule, that the well-bred young lady must never be allowed out-of-doors unattended, had, perforce, to be more and more relaxed in Ann's case; but she was so perfectly modest and decorous and, withal, was to be married so soon, that even Miss Pilkington was comfortably resigned to the inevitable.

On the evening before the wedding Ann brought in the little, white, low-necked bridal frock to show it to her aunt in its full beauty and completion; and tried on the bonnet, with its white satin ribbons, and the lace pelerine in which she was to "go away."

She was naturally pleased to give that little dress-rehearsal; and so gently attentive presently in herself bringing upstairs her aunt's mild supper of bread and milk, that Rachel felt, with a new, sudden stab at her

heart, how much she would miss her pretty companion.

Presently, from the bed, as in duty bound, the aunt tendered a little last, good, kindly advice on the right conduct of a wife—and felt herself suddenly pulled up against the blank wall of Ann's quiet self-satisfaction, which made her gently and absolutely certain of being perfect in every relation of life. When they said good night, the old spinster was almost ashamed, in the face of the bride's exquisite calm, of her own warm, agitated feelings and emotions.

The wedding-day—it was the 1st of July—dawned fine and hot.

Before half-past ten—the service was to be at eleven—Basset church presented an appearance of very uncommon animation. Carriages had begun to arrive from Dilchester; great barouches brought a sprinkling of the County. The free benches and the music-gallery were crowded with villagers; the school children, ready to scatter flowers, were drawn up in line outside. In the vestry, Parson Grant and Rover were dejectedly waiting the appointed hour—the Parson, having being greatly warned against being behind time, was much before it, and

"That's all right," says Mark, with a good deal of amusement in his eyes, and taking a chair by his hostess, "I met them driving into Dilchester as I was riding home from there, a couple of hours ago."

Pollie, who had her lace veil thrown back over her bonnet, and a very pretty excited colour in her cheeks, answered impulsively, "Then you ought to have stopped them!"

"Like a highwayman?" says Mark; and then added, "Why? It is the best thing that could have happened for everybody—except Railton."

When Harry took in the meaning of this speech, it offended his invincible good nature. "Anyhow, she's a deuced pretty girl," he said, rather crossly, in his usual phrase. "I don't see that Railton comes off so badly."

"I hope he don't," says old Peter, who had been eating steadily, and fell at once to eating steadily again.

"Well, here's health to the bride and bridegroom, whoever they are, and I am precious glad I don't have to make that speech," says the incurable optimist at the head of the table; and he drank to the good fortunes of Sir John and My Lady.

Presently, when old Grant and Harry

were plying the willing Tommy with good things, and enjoying the *naïveté* of the questions and surmises on his too fluent tongue, Mrs. Latimer turned to Spencer.

"I am not so surprised as I thought I was at first," she said. "You know—last Friday, I think it was—I saw Ann walking alone with Sir John, in the Rectory lane."

"Why didn't *you* stop them?" asks Spencer.

"Well," answered Pollie, slowly, "at first I thought Sir John was you."

Spencer looked at her for a minute; then considered the wine at the bottom of his glass; drank it; and said nothing.

When he presently left the Manor, he turned his steps, as a matter of habit, to the Benets'. But he saw no one, old Jeannie being upstairs in her petticoat, pinning the gala bonnet into a muslin bag, exceedingly wrathful with Ann for having caused her to buy it under false pretences; while the Doctor was with Miss Pilkington.

The worst of having no selfish personal history of one's own, is that one takes to heart much too deeply the affairs of other persons.

When old Benet took Rachel's hot, thin hand between his, and—best form of sym-

pathy—let her pour out to him as much as she wished to say, without leading her on to say that which she might wish hereafter she had not said, she reproached herself sharply that she had thought him ill-bred and had indulged a strong objection to his untidy eyebrows. He was so kind and sensible, and when she had recovered herself a little and declared loyally that if Ann liked Sir John better than Lionel she was not wrong to marry him, agreed so stoutly saying, "Of course not, of course not," that she felt relieved, believing the opinion of outsiders would not be greatly against her niece.

But, not the less, when he left her, she turned on her pillow and wept again. Old, poor, without definite occupation, she knew to the full the disadvantages of the spinsterhood Ann had been so anxious to avoid, and had never blamed her for avoiding it. The deceit towards herself she could abundantly pardon. But her warm and generous nature revolted against the callousness which had been ready to exchange, at a week's notice, ardour and devotion—for a better establishment; and her heart bled for the poor boy at the Chantry, whom she had liked—better than Ann could like anybody.

In the yellow barouche, on the way home from the church, neither Lionel nor his mother had uttered a word. Mrs. Darbisher put her hand on the boy's knee for a moment, but he did not even notice it.

At the house, he went straight upstairs to his rooms in a silence that frightened her. She had the wit not to follow him. After a while, and some consultation, she thankfully ordered the chaise to take her brother-in-law and young Chisholm to Dilchester, on the first stage of their journey home.

At the customary Chantry dinner-hour—six o'clock—the bell rang as usual.

His mother did not think Lionel would appear, but he did—with a very fair semblance of his usual manner. She helped him by running on vaguely during the meal about things she had seen, or not seen, in the newspaper, till the servants had left the room.

Then Lionel poured himself out a glass of port, and looked across at her with a vague irritation as if he wished she would leave him alone. Instead, she took a chair closer to him, and put a hand, not timid and deprecating as usual, but firm and fond, upon his. In a moment he had shaken it off, pushed

away the glass and plate in front of him with a rough movement, and with his head leaning upon his hands, broke, from his hot, sore heart, into a passion of abuse of Railton.

The man was a scoundrel and reprobate, an artful seducer of innocence—a damned liar, and a profligate! A week ago—no, not a week, only a few days—Lionel knew for certain that Ann cared for *him;* and then that—that Judas—says Lionel, concentrating his misery and bitterness into the epithet—deceived and persuaded her.

Mrs. Darbisher gathered her courage and said, for her, decidedly, "Only, Buppy dear, the right sort of woman couldn't possibly have been persuaded. If she really cared for you she never would have listened to him for a second."

The poor boy was so bruised and hurt himself, he could not help bruising and hurting, in revenge.

"You're glad then, I suppose," he said with a sneer and a sob. "You don't care what it means—to me."

Before the words were out of his mouth, he was stricken with the consciousness of the tears on her face, and with the sudden knowledge that the face itself had grown sunken

and thinner. She looked at him for a minute, and then got up and left him, and in her chair, Lionel found a wet ball of a handkerchief.

It was a somewhat gentler and calmer person who joined her in the parlour at tea-time.

As he entered the room the servant was bringing lights, and with them a small parcel, directed to Lionel. He opened it mechanically, and there, on the table before them, on white velvet backgrounds, lay the family rubies, gorgeously and gaudily reset to please the tastelessness of the bride. Mrs. Darbisher, who had simply liked the old settings for their associations, and whose own taste was not better than that of most people in her day, gave an exclamation of admiration. Lionel, who knew better, looked at the jewels —the stones were not really fine, and had owed, it seemed, almost all their beauty to the quaint delicacy of that old-world setting —and pushed them away with a laugh of contempt.

At once, suddenly, he and his mother began to talk, and as they talked, far into the July evening, it transpired that she had seen many things to which he had been blind—that

she had been positively wiser than himself; while, when she spoke of the forebodings and anxieties which had been in her mind, it dawned upon him that he had been actually selfish and self-absorbed; and he realized—that realization often only brought, too late, by death—that in spite of her annoying idiosyncrasies he really loved her well.

Before they parted that night they understood each other better than they had done for years.

A few days later, Spencer's horse elected to go lame.

Early one morning, he came up to the Chantry, and it was soon arranged that Lionel, whose sensitive pride had confined him entirely to the Chantry grounds since the *débâcle,* should drive Spencer on his rounds. For the first few days Lionel did all the talking; and his companion—let the wound bleed. But after a time, it was put into the boy's mind—presumably by Spencer, though he had certainly never said so—that it was unworthy a man of Lionel's brains and *calibre* to go whining after a woman—that there were great things to achieve in the world, out of the reach of her making or marring. Gradually, they began to talk less of

Ann and Sir John—and more of Lionel's future.

Presently, of an evening, Darbisher would come to Myrtle Cottage and announce his positive, vain young literary judgments; in short, show signs of a return to that pleasant self-esteem which is the mother of much cheerfulness. Spencer listened, and threw in a word now and again; sometimes stretched out his long arm for a book out of his shelf and passed it to Lionel. Lionel perceived, though he could not remember it had ever actually been said, that Spencer thought he had chances of literary success, and that the chances were not worth much without a good deal of reading—and experience.

"What about travelling?" says Spencer. "Study a foreign literature—in its own country?"

"There's my mother," answers Darbisher, doubtfully.

Spencer took the favourable opportunity of a professional visit to Mrs. Darbisher—whom sleeplessness and worry had made really ill—to suggest that it would be a good thing if she and Lionel went abroad. She was a chattering fool in Mark's judgment of her; and when she doubtfully agreed as to

the benefit Lionel might derive, and then entered into vague, diverting surmises as to the drawbacks of foreign parts, he felt scornful of her. However, he had come with a purpose, and meant to achieve it.

When Lionel joined them presently, and said gravely, "My mother does not like anything that is not perfectly British," Spencer, who believed in the value of a good bold lie when necessary to deceive the patient, roundly declared that British customs were practically universal on the Continent; that he had never beheld Frenchmen eating snails; and that—this in the 'forties—Mrs. Darbisher would be certain of getting a delicious cup of tea anywhere she liked.

Behind Lionel's back, Mrs. Darbisher caught Mark's eye, and winked her own solemnly. After that wink, Mark liked her much better. The next day, visiting her again, he again reassured her as to the comforts and security of the Continent; but there was a twitch now at the corners of his own humorous mouth; and he respected her, seeing she did not believe him, thought her chances of safety bad, and of enjoyment nil, and yet was going to take them, for Lionel's sake.

Before they left Basset, she made a farewell visit to Rachel Pilkington, whom she had not seen since the great *dénoûment.*

Mrs. Darbisher's mental giddiness and aptitude for verbal quips and cranks was by now—to Harry Latimer's especial satisfaction—almost restored. She kissed Rachel on both cheeks, sank suddenly, by great good luck on to an armchair instead of the floor, not having taken any bearings first, and ejaculated, when she recovered her breath (she had walked from the Chantry), "Well, that *was* a pretty kettle of fish, wasn't it?"

Rachel, with a very kind, distressed face, said, just as she had said to Dr. Benet, that she was indeed terribly sorry for Lionel, but that it was right Ann should follow the dictates of her heart.

"Heart!" says Mrs. Darbisher, looking at Rachel with a queer, quizzical expression. "Well, Buppy isn't going to break his, so she can do what she likes with hers. And I dare say it *is* very pleasant to be called my lady. Where are they now?"

Miss Pilkington produced a letter from a reticule, and prudently read aloud such parts only as described, safely, and tediously, the monuments and sights of London.

Very shortly afterwards, there drove through Basset the cumbered travelling carriage Miss Pilkington and Ann had once beheld from their windows, with the same young horseman riding at the side. Only now, his handsome face was less ingenuous, confident, and satisfied; he had lost some of the eager and generous trust of youth, and gained in its place—a poor exchange indeed—prudence and knowledge of life. But now, too, when his mother's flighty head popped out of the window, he stopped to listen to her erratic and meandering remarks with an air less annoyed and inattentive; and it may even be that, as his patience increased, she made smaller demands upon it.

So that Ann Thornbery had had her use and her meaning.

The Darbishers being safely out of the Chantry, Basset was not entirely surprised to hear, before the end of that exciting summer, that Sir John and his bride intended to come back to it.

In point of fact, about the beginning of September, its blinds were pulled up again; Adolphe, the French cook, various female servants, and great quantities of luggage were driven through the village; and Lady Railton

wrote Rachel a little note to say they were returning on Thursday, and she should run down on Friday morning to kiss her aunt and tell her all they had been doing. Miss Pilkington prepared a homily for the bride's benefit—as in duty bound, and not at all liking the task—but, after all, it was Sir John who came, in his wife's place.

Ann was busy, he said, unpacking her frills and furbelows, and had sent him instead. He took a chair in Miss Pilkington's small parlour—where he and Ann had spent a certain Sunday afternoon, whispering very softly, with Sarah keeping guard without—and was easy and at home at once. His sarcastic and ugly face softened as he talked. Of the past he hardly said anything, except to make a vague apology for the trouble and anxiety late events must have caused Miss Pilkington. But he inquired after her health with a genuine kindness and sympathy, and had an air of finding her society pleasant and restful. It is certain, at least, that, after his first visit, that old fool Rachel never again believed the stories that were told to his discredit, and had in his character and goodness the faith which can remove mountains—of proof.

As he was leaving, he asked her to dine at the Chantry on the following day. "How *very* good of Ann!" says fervent Rachel, taking it as a message.

When Sir John got back he told Ann what he had done, and she observed, not ill-temperedly, but in a voice rather more surprised than delighted, "Have you? How very soon!"

It cannot be said that Rachel exactly enjoyed that dinner, at which she was the only guest. To be sure, Ann's manner was her usual amiable and pretty manner; and Rachel was gratified to see a Pilkington in a Pilkington's proper place—that is, at the head of a substantial house and of many servants. That her niece was already perfectly assured and easy in that position, was as it should be; but, all the same, that assurance seemed to set the little, insignificant aunt below the salt; and the most unworldly of human creatures realized that night the advantages of the wealth she had not, and the position she had only thought she had.

Sir John, indeed, did something to restore her self-esteem—and so her content—by recalling the evenings he had enjoyed at her

father's hospitable table in old days, and asking after, or telling her of, various friends he had met there.

A few days later, he again gratified her by calling at the White Cottage, and planting a large basket of peaches and nectarines on her table, said firmly, "From Ann, with her best love."

Miss Pilkington, looking up to express her gratitude—always much warmer than the occasion demanded,—thought his face certainly extremely sardonic, and, as such, belying his nature. He stopped and talked to her for half an hour; and when he had left, Rachel remembered that, except that once, he had never mentioned Ann's name.

That evening, as he sat stretched lazily in a deep chair in his mother's parlour, he watched his wife very attentively out of his narrow, bright eyes, as she was working at Lady Lucy's table.

When was it that he had first known that this was no bird, fluttering under his hand, to his heart; that it was not she who had been caught unawares in the snare of the fowler? The bitterest irony of such mistakes is that one realizes them so soon, and yet just not soon enough. In the early days of the honey-

moon he had found out how quietly and simply clever Ann had been. He was finding out now every day what an irreproachable wife she was going to make him; how much she had his interests—since they were identical with her own—at heart; how she would make him take his proper place in the County; be duly magnificent, without undue extravagance; and spend his money sensibly and suitably in entertaining his equals.

Presently he asked her to sing, and with perfect readiness and good nature, she divested the harp of its brown holland clothes, and sang, "Angels ever bright and fair," with exactly the same expression, and only looking less angelic because she was more handsomely dressed, as she had sung it at the Manor.

Her husband, who had not changed his negligent attitude, watched her closely all the time. How easily, and how short a time ago, the singer and song had cajoled him!

In due course, things came about just as he had anticipated. Ann, having had the Chantry pew nicely redecorated and upholstered, her husband followed her into it on Sunday morning—in fact, on Sunday

mornings—rather indolently, a few paces behind her, and with his eyes lazy and cynical. He drove with her to call on the County in a new landaulette with a couple of handsome greys—the County, whom he had neglected for years, and who received him as the prodigal—reformed by Ann.

He soon found out that she would be much at Basset, because there she was lady-paramount—the only really wealthy and well-dressed woman in the place—while in town there were hundreds of other baronets' ladies, richer and finer. The frank admiration in Pollie Latimer's eyes of her lovely clothes, and Harry's palpable delight in her lovely face, were a more acceptable homage than the careless approval of strangers. Even the uncompromising hostility of Mrs. Benet's countenance, when Sir John and his bride met that lady one day in the village, was also really a compliment—indifference is the only insult.

It was on the very tip of Mrs. Benet's tongue, as she afterwards confessed, to inquire of the pair if they had had any news of Lionel Darbisher—and she refrained solely to oblige Dick. As it was, as they turned away, Ann certainly had some justification

for saying, rather warmly for her, "That is the rudest old woman I ever saw!"

Fortunately, in marriage, as with St. Denis and his head, "ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte," in the sense that, beside the first six months of an ill-assorted union, the next sixty years are comparatively easy.

With Sir John there was really a grim and ironical satisfaction in finding himself turned into a well-regulated domestic character; Ann's way, which, gently obstinate, she always took, was, after all, nearly always the right way; and he had the satisfaction of knowing that he held the final trump card of decision and mastery—if it were ever worth while to use it.

In a very short time, he took to spending one or two evenings a week with old Grant at the Rectory. Now he was absolutely and finally her own, Ann fortunately saw no use in her husband's dancing attendance on her —except in public—and was not *exigeante*.

So Peter and John sat together in Peter's rarely dusted study, and smoked, and said little. No allusion to Sir John's marriage, scarcely even Ann's name, ever passed Peter's lips. Had he grasped, dull and limited as he was, that the situation was not merely one

where it was impossible to offer sympathy, but one where it was impossible to show there was the smallest occasion for such an offer? Or was it simply that he was like old Rover—Rover, with his black, cold nose and shaggy head rubbing in one's hand—a good comforter because he *could* not speak? Perhaps the escapades of their past made a bond between the two men; and both knew they had no future.

The Parson was the battered hulk, which had once taken a short and prosperous voyage—to El Dorado. Beside him, on a quiet shore, there might well lie, in undisturbed neglect, the wreck of the fine ship which had foundered through a defect in the rudder.

CHAPTER X

AN ENDING

THE winter after the elopement set in early, rigorous and dull. The Chantry blinds were pulled down again, and Sir John and My Lady retreated to the bald, blank, family mansion in Norfolk—it being still the fashion to fight, not flee, the British climate—Lord Brougham having but just invented Cannes for the benefit of the upper classes.

At the Manor, Mrs. Latimer evolved a new salad dressing and a fresh stitch in wool-work; advanced to the irregular verbs in Latin—Tommy being five, and already in declensions; and subscribed to the *Quarterly,* feeling dimly apologetic towards Harry for that assumption of intelligence.

Things at the Rectory went on as usual; they always went on as usual.

Absolutely the only *on dit* of Basset was that old Doctor was doing less work and the young one was doing more.

It was certainly at a much earlier hour

of an afternoon that Richard descended from the gig, laid the reins across Neck-or-Nothing's sleeping back, and came up the flagged path to meet his wife.

"You're getting lazy, Dick," she said on one such occasion, as they returned to the house together; and he answered, in his thick, cheerful, old voice, "I'm getting uncommonly fond of my own fireside, Jeannie."

Another day, when she had divested him of the rugs, coats, and comforters which turned him into a bundle entirely filling their little hall, a sudden thought struck her.

"Why, Dick!" she said, with a sharp note in her voice, "you're thinner than you used to be."

"And you're fatter, Jeannie," says Dick, with his blue eye twinkling at her. But Jeannie was not to be distracted into by-paths by animadversions on her figure, to which she was perfectly indifferent.

"I shall fatten you up," she said, decidedly, as if he had been a prize fowl. And, lo! the next morning at breakfast there was a slimy substance floating on the Doctor's tea, which, on questioning, he found to be the yolk of an egg, recommended in the manuscript Recipe-book—which had descended

from Jeannie's aunt—as being a capital secret remedy for debility and emaciation, and not likely to be detected by the patient "unless of a suspicious character." Dr. Benet cried off that panacea; but the prodigality with which cream and butter were inserted into his puddings, Jeannie would certainly have thought sinful in a less excellent cause.

One evening, when Spencer was sitting with them as usual, old Benet left the dining-parlour for a few minutes to see a patient in the surgery. Jeannie looked up from her novel. "Do *you* think Dick's getting thin?" she said, her shrewd eyes fixed keenly on Mark's face.

There was a moment's pause. "I think he's getting old," said Mark.

"Old!" answered Jeannie, very sharply. "He's sixty-nine—*that* isn't old."

"David thought it was," replied Spencer.

Mrs. Benet gave a snort, as if to say she had no opinion of the opinion of the Psalmist.

"To tell you the truth," said Spencer, after they had both been silent a few minutes behind their books, "I think the Doctor wants a few days' holiday."

In the era of stage-coaches and expensive

travelling it was not merely convenient but necessary to think that, in a general way, one's complaints healed as well and as quickly in one's native place as anywhere else; and perhaps they did.

Since his marriage the Doctor had never slept out of his home for a single night. There had been an epoch, not long ago, when he ailed somewhat, and it had been his wife's great ambition to get him away for a week or two. With that end in view, she had a netted purse upstairs, mysteriously labelled "Pig," containing a few guineas derived from the sale of the inmates of the sty in the back-garden, and forming a Change of Air Fund.

She thought of that fund now, shut her eyes, did a short sum in her head—small, but serviceable exceedingly, was Jeannie's arithmetic—and said, very decidedly, "Dick shall go."

Mark entered into the plan with a warmth he did not often show, and the quick decision and mastery natural to him. He had, it appeared, a doctor friend in Cavendish Square—name, Adams—who would not only be delighted to have Dr. Benet as his guest, but to show him the sights of London

in general, and such things in particular as would appeal to them both professionally.

When old Benet returned from the surgery and this plan for his welfare was communicated to him, though he laughed a little and said, "I dare say, Jeannie! it is very easy to dispose of me like that," he did not raise the objections to it his wife had expected.

After fixing a very firm eye on both his face and Spencer's, she said, "I believe you two have been putting your heads together and have arranged this already behind my back."

Spencer, who, as a far more accomplished deceiver than old Benet, knew when honesty was the best policy, replied, "I did suggest it to the Doctor, but he said he wouldn't leave you."

Mrs. Benet went off at the tangent, as Mark, perhaps, had hoped.

"Leave me!" she cried, very indignantly. "Does the man suppose some one will run off with me?" (Indeed, to look at Mrs. Benet, this appeared a remote contingency.) "I shall get my cleaning done, and be thankful to do it;" and in her mental vision, Jeannie saw a satisfactory picture of the furniture

in the back-garden, and herself and Maggie enthusiastically scrubbing every floor in the house; throwing in, if there was time, a little amateur whitewashing of ceilings as well.

After that, the arrangements for the visit went on apace. Spencer did not appear to hurry them; but he certainly removed obstacles from their path. He evinced great sanguineness as to the recovery of a certain bad case Dr. Richard had been doubtful of leaving; and went so far as to express, what perhaps he always felt, a good deal of confidence in his own professional powers.

Once Jeannie said to her old man, rather severely, "And why, pray, is this Dr. Adams so anxious to entertain you in his house when he has never seen you?"

Richard, with his chuckle, made answer, "Why, that's the reason, Jeannie; he wouldn't be so anxious if he had seen me."

"Don't you eat unwholesome food late at night to please *him,*" says Jeannie, beholding her lord in fancy at the rich man's table. "And tell him I give you milk and an egg beaten up with brandy before you go to bed. I shan't send any of your thin underclothing, so you can't put on your summer shirts—*by*

mistake," she added, nodding at him meaningly.

Richard gave all the promises required. "But I don't like leaving you, Jeannie," he said, "I'm never comfortable away from you —that's the truth."

It was their last evening, and they were cording the luggage in the dining-room. Mrs. Benet said "Nonsense!" very loudly and firmly; and went immediately into the kitchen, for more cord.

The next morning when, in the cold and early dawn, the gig was waiting to convey the traveller to Dilchester, there to meet the London coach, Mrs. Benet had wrapped him up in so many and so stout layers of coats and shawls that he could scarcely stretch over himself to kiss her. His good old face, coming up out of the bandages, struck her suddenly and anew as thin and white. Certainly, Dick wanted a holiday! She gave his shoulder a resounding smack, and said, "Now, mind you enjoy yourself;" slipped a large flask of very sound port wine into one of his outer pockets, came with him down the garden path, waved at him with great vigour and cheerfulness till he had disappeared from sight, and then returned briskly to the dining-

room, which she began to clean with immense energy, taking no heed of two large tears running down her fat cheeks.

Spencer constantly came in to see her; and she read extracts to him from her old man's letters.

Mark also heard from his partner; but he did not offer to read aloud any part of these communications; they were, he said, entirely professional. Not once, but several times, he roused Mrs. Benet's ire by again rather pointedly alluding to her husband as old.

"I suppose," says Jeannie, not without snappishness, "you think any one over thirty-five is in his dotage." (Thirty-five was Spencer's precise age.)

"That's just about it," says Mark, laughing. And he looked at her almost compassionately.

The fortnight came to an end at last. On a murky, raining evening—it was now November—Neck-or-Nothing brought his master from Dilchester.

In the narrow little hall it was too dark to see anything clearly; but when the Doctor, unwrapped, came into the living-room, bright with fire and candles, and his wife looked up

into his face—a sudden dreadful premonition closed its icy hand upon her heart.

Had he foreseen, and arranged for, her penetration? He said instantly that he had found the journey cold and long, and that he was very tired. She gave him his supper —how much energy and pleasure she had put into its preparation—and asked him some of the questions she had been longing to ask for a fortnight about Dr. Adams' character and *cuisine*. But the answers fell on a mind quite pre-absorbed.

Over their tea, Richard told her how much pleasanter he found their own homely house and ways than the solid magnificence of Cavendish Square, and leant forward to pat her hand in the old fashion. She turned away at once to fetch their books—the Doctor's marker was still in "Midshipman Easy" in the place where he had left off a fortnight before—and they sat and read as usual; only, now and then, he looked up to tell her of something he had done or seen on his visit.

At nine o'clock he said that, as he was so tired, he would go to bed; and a look of relief stole into her eyes.

She and Maggie warmed the bed briskly

and thoroughly with the warming-pan, and when the Doctor was cosily settled in it—with his nightcap, in the shape of a jelly-bag, with a red tassel on the top, surmounting his simple, sensible face—Jeannie brought him a hot drink of no little potency, and saw him finish it to the last drop.

Then she went downstairs, put on her clogs, the same old shawl and bonnet in which, months earlier, she had gone to nurse Spencer, took the family gingham umbrella, and walked quickly, in a black and streaming rain, to Myrtle Cottage. Before her hand reached the knocker, Mark was at the door—almost as if he had expected her. She went into his sitting-room without a word, took the first chair she saw, leaning her dripping umbrella against her ample skirts, and then said firmly, "What's the matter with my old man?"

Spencer looked at her keen and penetrating eyes, at the rough bare hand, as steady as a rock, upon her knee; and told her.

She listened intently, without interrupting by a single question.

When he had finished, she said, "Does Dick know all this himself?"

"He's too shrewd not to know—as much

as we do," answered Spencer. He did not add how many times during the last few weeks he had wished the Doctor had been indeed the fool, he (Spencer) had once been fool enough to think him.

A coal fell out of the fire on to the hearth, and Jeannie turned her old head with a frown, as if the noise jarred on her.

"Is there anything to be done?" she said huskily.

It had, of course, often been Spencer's duty—and a duty, alas! to which he had never grown hardened—to scourge and flay with the truth; but he had never found that duty more difficult than to-night.

"Nothing—that can bring about his recovery," he said; knowing that it was more merciful to hit hard once than to hit soft often. "Dr. Adams has had him under close observation for a fortnight, and he came to the same conclusion. But everything that science can do to ease him, will be done."

"And that's very little," says old Jeannie, with great bitterness.

"It's more every day," answered Mark.

He knew much better than to offer her any advice as to her own conduct, and the

necessity for cheerfulness. He could let the counsel of her own heart stand.

Presently, when the rivulet from her umbrella had nearly reached one of Spencer's large feet, she got up, and said, in a voice not greatly different from her usual voice—

"Well, I suppose it's getting late."

Spencer saw her out of the door into the dark night, and then forced his attention upon the book he had been reading when she came.

When Jeannie reached home, she sent Maggie to bed, locked up the house, and upstairs, shading the candle with her capable hand, looked in at the bed-curtains on her husband. Calm, regular snores announced he was asleep, and in sleep the face looked less drawn and changed. She performed her simple toilette very softly, and—lying awake by the good, night-capped head, which for forty years had rested near her own with but one fortnight's interruption—swallowed sobs in her aching throat, and when the winter dawn came, "slept for sorrow."

Dr. Adams came down from London the next week to see his patient; and by that time all Basset knew of the loss which overshadowed them.

Hopeful Harry could by no manner of means bring himself to believe in such a calamity, and said to Pollie that he had always thought Spencer with his long face a deuce of a killjoy, and how *could* any doctor see what was going on inside you?

Still, the "riddle of the painful earth" did perplex him for a few minutes as he rode into Dilchester; until he met a brother squire—a cheerful soul—and forgot, as we all forget, to find life tolerable.

As for Pollie, she went straight into the kitchen to make her famous calf's-foot jelly, with a shadow in her eyes, and a protest in her ardent heart—*Why?*

Spencer also had found that question confronting him as he strained every nerve and power to find a remedy; and knew, all the time, in his soul, there was none.

Mrs. Latimer had left the jelly on the Benets without asking to see them, knowing —whether by instinct or experience—those who greatly suffer would fain suffer alone.

Rachel Pilkington, less wise, with tears in her eyes and bubbling sympathy in her heart—good measure, pressed down and running over—expressed it to Mrs. Benet with an emotion and fervour which, as en-

dangering to old Jeannie's stern and difficult self-control, enraged her with Miss Pilkington, and made her manner exceeding gruff and abrupt.

Lady Railton wrote a really kind little note to Mrs. Benet, of whom she had certainly had no reason to be fond.

Sir John, unknown to his wife, sent a very handsome cheque to Peter Grant, directing his cousin to spend it for the Doctor's comfort without revealing its source. Peter, having tramped into Dilchester, purchased a few strangely selected comforts for the sufferer, and presented them to Mrs. Benet with so much guilty embarrassment that she began to think he had stolen them; whereas Peter was really one of those unlucky persons who are transparently honest, not from principle, but because they cannot help it.

Of all the village, it was the old Doctor himself who took the most calmly the fate he had foreseen long before a word of his apprehension had passed his lips. For three or four weeks after his return from London, he was well enough to see some of his patients, and saw them.

But gradually he attended fewer, and fewer still.

Presently he took to breakfasting in bed. For a time he was able, when he came down, to walk round the little garden, with his old plaid about his shoulders, look at the cabbage stalks with the November frost on them, the pigs in the sty, and the chickens, which he ruefully wished would lay even fewer eggs than they did, since Jeannie manfully insisted on his eating them all. Not, indeed, that she greatly worried him by feeding him up; Spencer had told her that would be very futile. But how could she help sometimes, when for a day or two he did look better and eat better, hoping against hope and knowledge that, after all, there might be a mistake somewhere, as Richard himself, with all his inborn genius for diagnosis, had made mistakes in his time?

For a long while he could enjoy their cosy evenings as heretofore; chuckle a little over the latest Marryat or Dickens, as Jeannie mended the house linen, or looked above Lady Blessington, deep into the heart of the fire.

She roused herself from one such reverie to say, "Dick! you ought to have told me at once—when you first felt ill. You hadn't any business to deceive me."

He recalled his thoughts slowly from his book, and answered simply, "It was the first time, Jeannie."

There was no necessity to add that it would be the last.

Another night, it was old Richard who fell into reverie. Jeannie, making him a very warm new night-shirt, was really absorbed in "seam and gusset and band." Her old man got up and stood by the fire—a short, and not heroic figure—and looked down at her.

"It's been a very good world for us, Jeannie," he said. "And the parsons say the next'll be better."

"Much they know about it that we don't," says Jeannie, hoarsely, stitching for life, and not raising her head from the work.

"And yet, you know," says the Doctor, putting his hand firmly on her shoulder as she sewed doggedly, "though I have seen more suffering and sin than most men see, I suppose, yet *I* think that if this world can be so happy, there may well be a happier yet;" and his old hand stroked her stout arm softly, and settled on the fingers with the needle in them, which tried to go on working all the same, while the worker fought for her self-control.

"And the one thing we always wanted, we have now," old Richard went on, "a son in our old age."

At that moment, with a bang and a clatter of crockery, Maggie entered with the tea-tray, wearing—in obedience to a command of Spencer's that she was not to cry and look dismal—a broad, set, fatuous smile, which he never saw without reflecting on the wisdom of minding one's own business.

Jeannie got up at once to busy herself with the tea-making, with her head turned away from her lord; bade him, shortly and grumpily, sit down and enjoy his tea properly; arranged a shawl round his worsted-stockinged legs—draughts were the only ventilation of the day, and very thorough and searching they could be—and with an air of stern displeasure, which Richard did not misinterpret, drank her own tea by his side.

When the cups were put back on the tray, she collected her forces, and said, in a voice that suppressed feeling made harsh, what she had been struggling to say for many evenings.

"Richard, you're to tell me what you'd like me to do—afterwards."

He looked at her under the shaggy eyebrows to which Rachel Pilkington objected,

and said at once, "Why, you'll know that, Jeannie, when the time comes. You always know."

Then, lighting by sure instinct on the only consolation he could give her, he added simply, "You'll be glad—presently—Jeannie, I should go first. I should have missed you worse than you could miss me."

That Jeannie said "No!" very loudly and suddenly, did not turn him from his point.

"Yes, old woman, yes," he said, nodding and looking at her with his wise, blue eyes. "Why, we're always more dependent on you than you are on us. You've said so many a time."

Jeannie said briefly, "You're more cheated," and having come to the end of her tether for the time, took up the night-shirt and sewed at it again, defiantly.

Sometimes, Spencer came in in the evenings; but less often than of yore, and for a shorter time.

As the days went on, the old Doctor could do less: and less still. He suffered not greatly—never so greatly, he knew very well, as Jeannie suffered to see him suffer. He did not disguise from her either that suffering or the fact that his malady made quick

progress. What use? The boy, "winged Cupid," is "painted blind" justly, no doubt; but the old, tried affection, which has lived the day and slept the night at one's side these forty years—which knows, by heart, every look of the face, every tone of the voice—there is no deceiving.

If Spencer did not disturb their evenings, he was often with them in the day, in all such brief intervals as his double practice left him. Quiet and resolute, he brought with him an atmosphere of confidence. He had his plans for the doctor's easing well laid, and kept Mrs. Benet more than busy in helping him to carry them out.

The day soon came—sooner than Spencer, or he himself, had foreseen—when old Richard could not rise from his bed. Dr. Adams came down again from London, and as he bade Mrs. Benet good-bye, said to her—with all his experience in finding cheerful statements it was the best he could think of—"Well, you have a first-class man in Spencer—too good for a country village"; and he liked her the better (she had appeared to him as a repellent old woman) when she answered, "So was my husband—much too good."

Soon it became necessary that some one

should sit up at nights with the sick man. As it greatly distressed him if his wife missed her usual rest, she went to bed, and since Richard so much wished it, tried to sleep and sometimes succeeded, while, first of all, Spencer took her place in the Doctor's room. But he had his work to do in the day, and an *aide-de-camp* was necessary.

A deep pleasure and satisfaction glowed in Peter Grant's dim old soul when he was chosen for this responsible office. He attired himself for the part in an ancient greatcoat and muffler. In an agony of apprehension lest he should sleep at his post, he sat, in his stocking-feet, on a very hard, straight-backed chair near the door, in order that the nipping blast which blew under it should make the feet so cold that sleep would be impossible. He wrote, and pinned on the Doctor's bed-curtains, a large foolscap sheet of instructions—slightly mis-spelt—as to the hours the patient was to take medicine or nourishment. When it became necessary to put coals on the fire, the creaking of the boards under the weight of his great person caused him suffering it certainly did not inflict on the Doctor.

Perhaps it was not professional that, having put on the coals with his fingers, he

should leave five large black marks on the bedcover when he next administered a dose; and the kettle on the hob, in readiness to make a cup of tea when required, seemed to tip over if he so much as looked at it.

But in place of the calm, efficient, detached attitude of the trained and hired nurse, this one brought a zeal, an affection, a dumb sympathy, which professionalism must needs lack, and which doubtless reached old Richard in his bed and warmed and comforted him. When there was anything unusual to be done, the patient sat up, put his old head—still in the red-tasselled nightcap and with but a shrunken face underneath—through the curtains, and told the nurse what to do. And the nurse very likely would have done it better, had he been less desperately anxious to do well.

Old Rover always accompanied Peter to his night-watch and lay outside the bedroom, as he lay in the vestry during service. When he scratched at the door, as he did in church, Peter followed the same method of procedure —put his head out, shook his fist, and said "Hush!" very deeply and menacingly.

What thoughts the Parson thought, as he sat there watching the dawn come slowly

in at the curtained window, and listening to the breathings of the dying man and the noises of the fire—who knows?

Perhaps his whole dull mind was busy goading his body to keep awake. Perhaps he vaguely reflected how, when his own time came, the books he must show his Maker would be but neglected and ill-kept accounts beside this man's.

It is certain that he never offered the Doctor any spiritual ministrations.

Once, when Richard expressed a wish to be read to, the Parson creaked downstairs—it was the middle of the night—for "Snarley-yow," and took up that narrative at the spot at which he found the Doctor's marker. The listener laughed feebly once or twice, till he fell into a brief sleep; and Peter blundered over the long words, and finally broke the sleep by dropping the book off his knee on to the floor with a thud. But as for praying with him—the Parson's humble heart could never have been persuaded that Richard Benet needed *his* prayers. The Doctor's life—that life of simple devotion to duty—would surely better plead and avail.

By the early morning, when Spencer and Mrs. Benet came to relieve guard, the night-

nurse had generally reduced the sick-room to an extraordinary state of chaos. Spencer's dark eyes began to gleam as they caught Mrs. Benet's indignant orbs, when she discovered that Peter's heavy form had crunched up the leg of a chair, and his clumsy hands broken a cup and saucer; and they both began to laugh a little—perhaps, like Figaro, that they might not weep.

For, indeed, the end was coming—painfully.

One day, Pollie, bringing a fresh instalment of calf's-foot jelly, found the door opened to her by Mrs. Benet herself, and the old woman silently signed to her visitor to come into the sitting-room. There was a bright fire burning on the hearth, and the large-faced Dutch clock in the corner ticked its loud, companionable tick as usual; but the Doctor's old horsehair chair, with the threadbare arms, the home-made bookcase on the wall where his four or five well-thumbed literary friends stood cheek by jowl, and his old plaid simply suspended on a nail behind the door, conveyed the cold and desolate sense of a missing presence.

The two women sat down together on the sofa, and the younger took off her great

bonnet and laid it on her lap, and put her soft and compassionate face for a moment against Jeannie's stout, wrinkled cheek, and tightly held one of the old woman's hands.

Had Pollie known before situations in life which have neither words nor tears?

In a few minutes, the two were in the kitchen, turning the jelly out of its mould and Pollie was earnestly recommending Maggie to keep it in a cool place till it was needed, and telling Mrs. Benet that Harry was waiting about at home, instead of shooting pheasants, ready and anxious to ride into Dilchester at any moment to fetch what might be wanted.

But the Doctor was fast passing beyond human wants.

That same evening, in a very cold, brief twilight, when Spencer had just left, and old Grant had not yet arrived to take up his sentinelship, Richard signed to his wife to sit beside him; and she sat there, in their old, companionable silence, watching the thin ghost of the face she had known. After a time, he asked for a little of the beef-tea—her good beef-tea, which she always made with her own hands. When she put an extra shawl over his feet, he thanked

her with his eyes, and murmured something that sounded like his favourite, contented phrase, "Very comfortable, Jeannie, very comfortable."

Then, holding her faithful hand, he passed quietly to where, if he were Richard Benet still, he would but love her better.

In those days, everything that could be done, in the way of mourning and funeral arrangements, to make the survivors more wretched, was done, most conscientiously.

Eliza Pilkington, deputed to choose in Dilchester poor old Jeannie's weeds, did her best, and worst. But, perhaps, even a bonnet hugely and grotesquely black, and the discomfort of a panoply of a stiff, sticky material called bombazine, had their uses. For Jeannie believed they did old Richard honour; just as she believed the expensive, heavy funeral—with its plumes and hatchments, mutes imperfectly sober and of a jocularity ill-concealed, the great pall of velvet on the coffin, and the church hung with black—did him honour too.

Nor, perhaps, was it wholly a misfortune for her that it was the custom of the day to have even more eating and drinking at funerals than at weddings, and that she was

compelled, with Maggie's help—and with what an empty and aching heart!—to be baking, for several days, pies and puddings for the friends and mourners. To be sure Pollie and Mrs. Jones helped greatly; and Miss Pilkington's sour Sarah, moved and kind for the nonce, brought in home-made cakes.

But it was not till the funeral service was actually going on that old Jeannie found "a little leisure for grief"; and sitting in her bedroom, with her hands clasped on her black lap, and her eyes dim and sorrowful, lived through—something better than she had supposed possible—the blankest moments of her life.

After all, what "had been, had been, and she had had her hour."

On the following Sunday morning she went, as it was *de rigueur* she should go, to church.

The great cold building was still solemnly draped in black; there were black hangings, much tasselled, in the Doctor's pew, and by Jeannie's side the tall, dark figure of the son of her old age. Hard by were Harry and Pollie; and Tommy, in the thrilling excitement and interest of his first mourning suit. The whole church was full of people similarly

arrayed; who had mostly loved the old Doctor faithfully and well; and a few who suffered the more at his loss, perhaps, that they had not loved him stauncher and better. Sir John had stayed at the Rectory in order to be present at the funeral (the Chantry being shut up), and was also in his place to-day.

Poor Peter, knowing an original funeral sermon would be expected of him, had set ink, quills, and manuscript before him on his table in his study, and spent hours gazing desperately at them, just as he had done when he first took Orders—and with the same result. If he had not lost, by disuse, the feeble power he had ever had of expressing himself, the very strength of his feelings would have made him dumb; and the faltering, gruff tones in which he delivered bought *banalités* were really a better witness to his affection and sorrow, than the suitable and sonorous phrases in which a Parson Pilkington might have borne testimony to a friend.

Rachel, indeed, with her sensitive face flushed and her eyes full of tears, could not help whispering to Pollie, as they came out of church together, that she thought Mr. Grant's sermon dreadfully inadequate; but

that shrewder woman, old Jeannie, made no such mistake.

For a few days, Spencer did not intrude even his presence on his friend's grief. On the evening of the fourth day after the funeral he appeared in the parlour at her five o'clock dinner time, with a newspaper parcel, exuding under-clothes, beneath his arm; having left snowy coat and hat in the hall. He put down the parcel on the sofa, and said simply, "I've come to dinner."

"You can't. There isn't enough," answers Mrs. Benet, shortly, just beginning her meal.

"Plenty," says Spencer, with the old light coming into his deep eyes; and he lifted up the cover of the dish in front of her, and sat down in his usual place at her side. Maggie brought in an extra knife, fork, and plate; and, after a time, as the diners talked together, the harsh, sad lines on old Jeannie's face relaxed a little.

When the table was cleared, Spencer put his parcel on it, inserted a large forefinger through a still larger hole in a sock, and said, "Not a soul has touched them for six weeks, except the stitches in time I put in myself."

"And they are worse than nothing," answers Mrs. Benet; and in a few minutes she

fetched her serviceable workbox and began to darn, while Spencer took—deliberately and as if by intention—the Doctor's armchair; and the two sat in silence, with the Dutch clock ticking accompaniment to their thoughts.

After a while, Spencer said, "Shall you stay on here?"

He knew the contents of the Doctor's brief and very simple will, which had left his little all absolutely and without restriction to the wife whom he had trusted as his own soul, and which had expressed no further direction or wish.

"Why not?" said Mrs. Benet, briefly.

After a time, he asked, "And what will you do?"

"Keep house," says Jeannie, with a catch in her breath.

In a long pause they both thought, in their different fashions, how, if it be the best thing in the world for the woman to keep house for the man she loves, it is the dreariest of all dreary and selfish things to live to keep house for herself alone.

About seven o'clock Spencer rose to go; and Jeannie, darning, raised her head.

"Shall you be in to-morrow?"

"Every day," says Spencer.

Mrs. Benet observed that he had better leave his shirts behind him, as their condition was disgraceful; and as he was going out of the door, she called to him to mind and see that lazy, slatternly thing—this was her usual synonym for the proprietress of Myrtle Cottage—warmed his bed with the warming-pan on these cold nights. So that Spencer, walking quickly home in the darkness, knew his visit had attained its object.

When, presently, Mrs. Benet went to Spencer's parcel to find another shirt, her hand fell upon something hard.

There, brand-new, piping hot from the Dilchester circulating library, was the first of the three volumes of a novel such as her soul had loved. In it, there was a slip of paper in Spencer's handwriting—"Some of your trash"—Mrs. Benet's deplorable taste in fiction having long been a joke between them.

There was a smile on her fat, sad face, though her lips trembled, as, standing, she opened the book.

The atmosphere of dukes and diamonds, in which she had always delighted, closed slowly round her. By the time the Earl, who was the son of a Baronet had begun proposing to the Viscountess, Mrs. Benet had sunk

down on her chair, still reading—with a threaded needle stuck perilously into her bombazine bodice—and had found for the moment the distraction from sorrow which, in its time and place, is better than all resolution.

CHAPTER XI

A BEGINNING

ONE snowy morning, before the grass was green on Dr. Richard's grave—or rather, before the Dilchester stonemason had perpetrated above it a marble abomination representing two angels flying to Heaven with a funeral urn (Tommy Latimer took them to be portraits of Dr. and Mrs. Benet)—Basset was startled by the news that its sole remaining medical attendant was about to leave it, for a partnership with the great Dr. Adams and a house in Wimpole Street.

It was further reported that Mrs. Benet was to accompany him and live with him; at the same time, by his suggestion, keeping on her little home in Basset, and occasionally returning to it.

Miss Pilkington, meeting Harry Latimer in the village, expressed herself as greatly distressed at the prospect of another change of doctors. When the always consolatory Harry replied that should she be in London

she could still consult Spencer, she answered, with much earnestness and *naïveté*—

"Oh no, Mr. Latimer. One could never believe the opinion of anybody one knew *personally* was worth two guineas."

Old Grant was as much perturbed by the news as he had it in him to be perturbed about anything; called on Spencer one evening expressly to lament and congratulate; sat for two hours, smoking mournfully, and quite forgot to do either.

Very early on a February morning—a morning of a chill, thin air, with the first exquisite scent in it of the coming spring—Spencer and Mrs. Benet left Basset in the Manor chaise, on the first stage of their journey.

Harry, whose excellent spirits were not damped even by early rising, came to see the travellers drive away. Miss Pilkington and Sarah were at the door of the White Cottage, waving good-bye. Maggie was weeping loudly, as Maggies will. Mrs. Benet fiercely winked back the tears in her own eyes, sharply reproved Maggie for hers, and kissed her. Spencer attended to the luggage and the cobs almost in silence.

They drove off to the accompaniment of

Harry's cheerful *bon voyages* and *au revoirs* —of course, in honest English. Steady columns of smoke were rising from the chimneys of the Manor as they passed it; and within, its mistress was already busy with the duties of her day and life.

Many living people can remember having consulted, in the 'forties and 'fifties, the well-known Dr. Mark Spencer of Wimpole Street, who, after the death of his partner, Adams, which occurred shortly, specialized in the nervous diseases then just coming into vogue.

Most of Spencer's patients agreed that he brought to his work a judgment as brilliant as it was quick; that though he was not genius doing what it must, he was talent doing what it can—to the utmost limits of endeavour. Mrs. Benet had several times informed him that, in her opinion, he was not nearly so good at telling people when they had nothing the matter with them as her old Dick would have been; and, in point of fact, for the patients whose complaints caused them little suffering and their friends a great deal, Spencer had but a scanty patience. For unselfish, genuine sufferers he kept a sympathy and a resourcefulness in remedy

which some of them still gratefully remember.

Every now and then a nomadic light—Mrs. Benet soon learnt to recognize it—came into his eyes; and, having packed the carpet-bag of the epoch, he went into far countries—to learn, in that age of insularity and prejudice, the lessons of other peoples and other minds.

No one will be surprised to hear that his faithful friend always put into the carpet-bag a small case of her own patent remedies against disease, with her own written instructions as to their use; while nothing but a lucky ignorance of foreign tongues prevented her forewarning the chambermaids at the hotels at which Spencer proposed to stay, to warm his beds and air his clothes.

But if she could not direct his travels she very successfully managed his house. The leisurely, dismal man, who always opens the door in the consulting physician's establishment, under her rule received Spencer's victims, if not with cheerfulness, at least with promptitude. When the traveller returned from his foreign wanderings, he found always, not only his house swept and garnished and the fires ablaze, but that kind,

homely face, under its monstrosity of a widow's cap, to greet him in the hall, and a sound, welcoming smack on his back from a strong hand.

It is true that, when the long and profound mourning of those days no longer gave him a welcome excuse for not having dinner-parties, Mrs. Benet was hardly so successful as a hostess at the end of his table. Spencer used to laugh when he woke up in the middle of the night, after such a festivity, and recalled her habit of declining always to let the cavalier on her right carve the joint for her, and never speaking a word to him until she had herself finished that operation—and not always then.

After they had been in town about a year, the Darbishers settled near them—Lionel now doing modestly well as a writer, and likely to do better.

The wounds of self-love are often slower to heal than the wounds of love; and, but for the humiliating circumstances of her rejection of him, Lionel would almost entirely have forgotten Ann Thornbery. When, on the first occasion he and his mother dined in Wimpole Street, Mrs. Darbisher streamed absently into the room—

> "A Lawne about the shoulders thrown
> Into a fine distraction—"

and impulsively kissed a total stranger on both cheeks—mistaking her for one of the dearest Sophys or Janes of her girlhood—Lionel bore the incident with a most creditable show of equanimity. When her sallies set the table in a roar, he joined in it—if a trifle faint-heartedly—instead of sitting stiff, red and self-conscious behind his high, fashionable stock, as in old days.

Presently, Mrs. Benet, having returned alone for a few weeks to Basset, brought back the news that there was an heir at the Chantry; that twice a week a tutor from Dilchester supplemented Mrs. Latimer's efforts with Tommy's education; that Harry had had his periodical attack of gout, and, when its first natural petulance was over, felt, as usual, perfectly certain he was never going to have another.

"You can't help liking that man, try as you may," said Mrs. Benet, as if she had tried.

Spencer had not asked after his friends at the Manor. Mrs. Benet told him without asking. She used to read aloud to him—

sometimes as he sat in his consulting room in the intervals of patients—the letters, much crossed, which Pollie wrote to her; and Spencer listened without comment.

From time to time, he sent Mrs. Latimer French books—she was learning French, with Harry's hearty approval, as he thought it a finicking, feminine language unworthy a man and a Briton, and so eminently suited to one's wife. If there was anything to say about the books, Spencer sent a message in one of the long and detailed epistles in which Mrs. Benet replied to Pollie's, and recounted the events of her own, and of Mark's life.

It was three years before Spencer saw Basset again.

Mrs. Benet had preceded him thither, and the season was early spring. He walked from Dilchester—as he had walked when he had first entered the village, solitary and dispirited, filled with the gloomy forebodings of shattered health, and the determination to be master of such a melancholy and of his fate. The ordinary observer would have said that he was not less lonely now. But he walked along at a quick, swinging pace, with eyes keen and observant, and certainly with nothing about him of the listlessness of depression.

It was a lovely evening, and the setting sun lay softly on the tranquil place.

The five years since he had first seen it had wrought scarcely any change. There were the old stocks, and the green; and the slimy pond, which Spencer had solemnly warned his patients not to drink, and which they were still drinking, with more or less impunity. There, with its rose-covered porch, was the rustic inn, looking perfectly pastoral and innocent. Spencer remembered, with a smile, what pains he had been at to assure his friends that it was guilty—guiltier than the pond—of many of their sicknesses and sorrows; and how just a few, perhaps, had believed him. At that very moment, Farmer Finch, who, by all the rights of medical science, ought long ago to have been dead—and was better—rumbled past in his gig. There was the church, gaunt and bare, and the untidy grave-yard, where Finch's sheep were sometimes turned in to graze, and where Richard Benet lay, awaiting the call to nobler and wider work.

The Manor gates had been newly painted; the Rectory gates certainly had not.

Sir John Railton was coming down the lane which led to the village from the Chan-

try. He greeted Spencer in his easy, pleasant fashion, seemed really glad to see him, and congratulated him on his success in his career. As he spoke of it—almost always when he spoke to Spencer—a kind of contempt came into his clever eyes—contempt for himself, that, having double this man's opportunity, and not less than this man's intellect, he had achieved nothing, and would achieve nothing, for ever. But Spencer noticed that when he asked after the heir, a new expression of great gentleness came on to Sir John's harsh face.

They parted near the White Cottage. At Dr. Richard's house there was old Jeannie just as of yore, with her skirt turned up and her feet in clogs, tending the border of arriving flowers on either side of the flagged pathway.

The next morning, Spencer went to the Rectory and found Peter Grant engaged in mending, very inefficiently, the roof of a potting shed through which Tommy Latimer had made a sudden and unpremeditated descent on the previous day.

Peter and Mark had not exchanged a letter or a word for three years; but they took up their friendship exactly where and as

they had left it. In two minutes, Spencer had his coat off, and was working at the repairs quickly and keenly. At the end of an hour, during which they had spoken seldom, and very likely said everything there was to be said, Mark pulled on the coat again, looked up at the roof of the shed, remarked "Not so bad," nodded at Peter, and went his way.

The Parson stood looking after him. In the three years, Peter seemed to have grown but little older and something shabbier. Of fate and his household, he expected less and less. The congregations had grown slightly better when the Latimers presented the church with a stove. The Table and pulpit hangings had fallen into rags, past all mending. Peter's character was also past mending, perhaps. Now and then Maria, bustling and worried, descended upon him unexpectedly, just to see that his cook was still thoroughly married and that he had been doing nothing foolish as regards his will. Indeed, he had not. He knew the claims of Maria's hungry and stolid brood, and that Tommy Latimer only wanted his friendship.

That night, Mrs. Benet told Mark how, calling at Miss Pilkington's a few days be-

fore, she had discovered that descendant of the Norman Pylkes sitting on the floor of her little parlour, with Sir John in an attitude hardly more dignified, both wholly absorbed in entertaining John Railton, the younger—also seated on the floor and crowing with glee as that foolish Rachel caused to prance towards him her two much-cherished little statuettes of Lords Brougham and Melbourne. When the younger John flung Melbourne from him into the fender, Mrs. Benet declared that absolutely the only thing about the breakage which worried Miss Pilkington was the necessity of truthfully accounting for it to Sarah, without incriminating the breaker.

Rachel had, in fact, found her niche in life, though it was a small one, and she was late in finding it at all.

At the end of this little scene on the parlour floor, Lady Railton came in, immaculately fair and sweet as ever and beautifully dressed for driving, having left the landaulette and the greys outside. She looked down at Sir John—who was on all fours and heated—and at her aunt, whose cap was awry, with her little, cool, detached smile. Rachel, instead of feeling foolish, as she

would once have felt in such a situation, simply said, with spirit, "You had better come and play too, Ann."

Mrs. Benet left at that juncture. It was her uncharitable conviction that that girl was too dressed out to play at anything but the fine lady; but she had to add in justice that she had seen the greys pawing the ground without for another ten minutes and that she could not be certain that Ann only loved the heir—as a creditable appendage to herself.

At the end of Spencer's fourth day in Basset, Harry Latimer returned from a few days' visit to a neighbouring squire, and Spencer walked up to pay his respects at the Manor.

That seemed unchanged too, or little changed. Dim and Tim came out to greet him, loudly and affectionately, as of old. There was still the strong sense of their mistress' personality about her fragrant and orderly rooms. In the drawing-room, she had worked a new fender-stool and a pole-screen. On the mantelpiece the shepherd still piped to the shepherdess, and the alabaster lady in her glass shade held her dainty handkerchief and gown. On the inlaid ormolu

table there lay still "The Castle of Indolence," "Marmion" in a shiny tartan binding, and "The Books of Beauty," with their soft verses. Only now, evident and unashamed, there lay beside them the current number of the *Quarterly,* "so savage and tartarly," and the serene "Pensées" of Vauvenargues which Spencer himself had only lately sent Mrs. Latimer from town.

When she came into the room, though there was light and colour in her face, Spencer saw at once that the three years, which had left not a trace of their passage on Lady Railton's delicate smoothness, had written the unmistakable lines of thought and care round Pollie's eyes, and that the eyes themselves were graver.

But he knew, too, that it was not the face of an unhappy woman into which he looked.

She began to talk quickly and eagerly, in her old fashion, pausing sometimes as if she were trying not to forget any of the many things she had long waited to say. Spencer, in *his* old fashion, said but little; but when Pollie recalled that little, she realized that he had spoken advisedly with his lips.

Very soon, of course, they came to the subject of Tommy. Pollie told Mark her

plans for his future, all the time using the plural number as if Harry's affection for the child were as great as her own; and, indeed, it was only in quality it differed.

Then Harry came in (Tommy was at Parson Grant's, testing the amateur mending of the potting-shed roof with his boot), bringing with him, as he always brought, a fine sense of the open, and that excellent *joie-de-vivre,* not perhaps in itself a virtue, but surely akin to one when persisted in to dull middle-age, in our grey world.

The two men went round the grounds together. But it was Mrs. Latimer alone who —with the keen wind blowing her curls about her face, and the slight smallness of her figure hidden under her old fur pelerine—accompanied Spencer down the drive to the gate.

As they walked, she said, "I suppose you will not be very often in Basset? You generally travel when you get away?" And she added, with half a sigh, "I have thought sometimes I should like to travel too."

After a minute, he answered, "In books, you can. After all, you know, the world we dream is better than the world we see."

She thought that over and said, "Yes," slowly.

Then Spencer added, "Somebody said—I forget who it was—that if one had one's duty and a dream, one had enough for life."

Pollie thought again, and then lifted her clear face, and said—

"I think that is true."

In a moment, Spencer had raised his hat and was gone.

That night, as he and Mrs. Benet sat, as they had sat so often, in her shabby, comfortable parlour, by the side of a fire which the east wind without made excusable and pleasant, Spencer, reading, found Jeannie's eyes fixed so long and intently upon him that at last he looked up, with the old twinkle in his own, and said—

"Is there anything wrong with my face?"

Mrs. Benet replied ambiguously that it was much as usual; did a little more darning; and fell to studying him attentively again.

"Should you call yourself a happy man?" she asked.

Spencer seemed to weigh his words; then he said—

"I would not change places with any one I know;" and, after a pause, "Would you?"

"Certainly not," answered old Jeannie; "but then—I've had Dick."

Spencer did not tell her whether his own content lay only in the blessedness of having found his right work in the world. But, as she stretched across him to reach her mending wool from the table, she laid her rough old hand, firmly and fondly for a moment, on his shoulder.

After all, she had his secret.

THE END